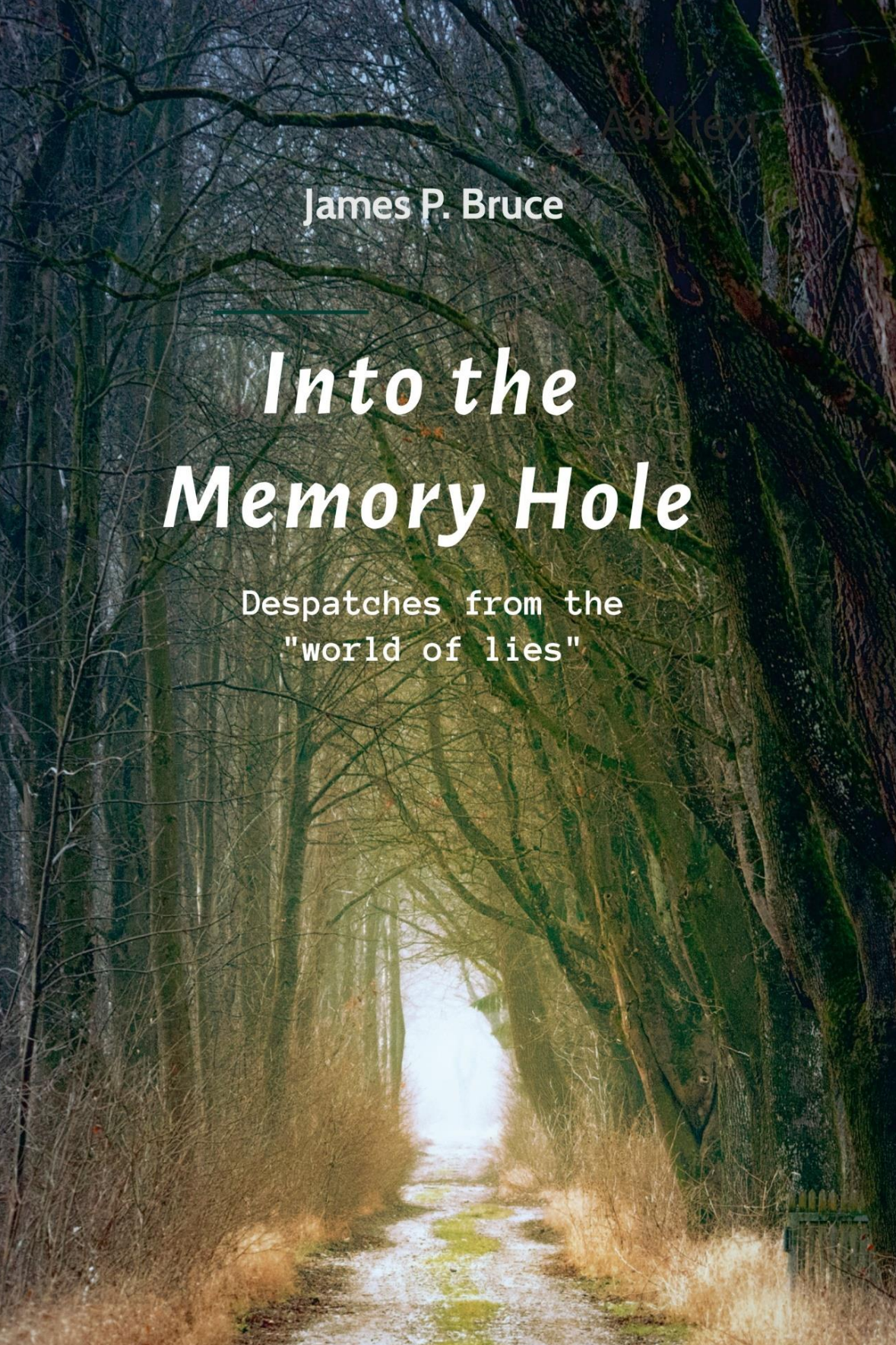
James P. Bruce
Into the Memory Hole
Despatches from the "world of lies"

Into the Memory Hole

Also by James P. Bruce

Faithful Servant: A Memoir of Brian Cleeve (2007)

Ireland's Hope: The "peculiar theories" of James Fintan Lalor (2020)

Into the Memory Hole

Despatches from the
"world of lies"

James P. Bruce

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ebook

To John Waters
fear dána

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Introduction

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, George Orwell's novel about a future "world of lies", the author introduced us to the 'Memory Hole'.[1] It is a device used by Orwell's imagined government officials to ensure that existing records, like press reports or photographs, do not contradict current government thinking.

In his novel Orwell described how an employee of the regime would drop an offending record into the 'Memory Hole' to be "whirled away on a current of warm air to the enormous furnaces which were hidden somewhere in the recesses of the building."[2] But that was only the first step. It was not enough to destroy a particular record, it had to be replaced in such a way as to make it appear that the new version *was* the original. Orwell called it a "process of continuous alteration" of the past.[3]

My title, *Into the Memory Hole*, seems appropriate for a book dealing with the past. However the Orwellian twist means that it is not merely a dry history lesson, let alone a nostalgic trip back to my own youth. To be sure there is plenty of history and lots of personal memories within these pages. However my purpose is not merely to recreate the past but to challenge it, or at least my assumptions about it. You could say that the book chronicles my own journey into the 'Memory Hole' in order to retrieve a few of those discarded records before they are consumed by the flames. Perhaps by doing so I have managed to recover, or rediscover, a little of the truth previously hidden in Orwell's "world of lies".

In Book I you will find articles I first published online in *Na Seascaidí* between January 2020 and February 2022.[4] In March 2021 I began writing *History in the Making* in order to extend my perspective further back than the 1960s. Those articles are collected in Book II.[5] In both cases they are all here, or most of them anyway. I left out a few where the little text in the originals would be meaningless without the accompanying photos or videos.

The date under each article heading refers to when the article appeared in either *Na Seascaidí* or *History in the Making.* In a few cases, where I included something I had published previously, the original publication date is also shown.

Both sets of articles consist of explorations, meditations, and commentaries on a variety of topics in which I am interested, the main ones being religion, music, and money. Given the period during which I was researching and writing, it would have been impossible to avoid the 'elephant in the room'. So medical issues are covered too – especially *the* medical issue

[1] George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Penguin edition, London 2013), p. 17.
[2] Ibid, p. 44.
[3] Ibid, p. 46.
[4] See https://www.seascaidi.ie.
[5] See https://jpbruce.substack.com.

(yes, *that* one).

Whether the reader dips in and out of the book or goes through it systematically, he or she will find a mixed bag of individuals, including Adam Smith, Jesus Christ, Charlotte Brontë, Muhammad Ali, Patrick Pearse, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Among the more arcane or just plain unknown subjects are Étienne Cabet, Richard Mead, and Mitsouko. Santa Claus is not the only mythical or fictional character within – Vito Corleone, James Bond, and Éiru appear too. All these names and others can be found in the Index.

The reader might spot a few differences between the articles inside and the online editions - but nothing too startling I hope. For example, when I began writing *Na Seascaidí* I used Irish-language headings for most of the articles. In reprinting them here I have added English translations.

I have also rephrased or expanded some of the content of both *Na Seascaidí* and *History in the Making* to make my meaning a little clearer. In doing so I have tried to resist the temptation to add any additional knowledge or insights I gained since the originals were published. So the articles that follow should reflect what I believed and thought at the time I first wrote them.

I take full responsibility, not only for the arguments and conclusions within these pages, but also for the accuracy of the information on which they are based. Although I have tried to ensure that everything is correct, I apologise for any errors of fact that escaped my notice.

J. P. Bruce
May 2023

I. Na Seascaidí

24th January 2020 - 26th February 2022

ORIGINAL INTRODUCTION TO *NA SEASCAIDÍ*

Na Seascaidí (pron. Nah Shas-k'dee) = The Sixties (in Irish)

The 1960s heralded great change across the western world. A trite and unoriginal observation perhaps, but also true. As one commentator put it, "It was a time of rude energy, a contempt for tradition, in which the material fruits of post-war sacrifices and reconstruction could be enjoyed".[1] The young grew their hair long, listened to psychedelic music, smoked marijuana, and had sex with whoever they fancied. Well if the documentary about the 1969 Woodstock festival is to be believed, some of them did at least.

What about the youth of Ireland? According to *The Irish Times*, "1960s Ireland was monochrome and monolithic".[2] Yet I don't remember it like that. Drugs and sex might not have been prevalent, and long hair was frowned upon by the Christian Brothers, but everything seemed exciting and new to me. Maybe that's because I turned 13 in 1966. If I were ten years older perhaps I would have felt the same about the 1950s. But I don't think so somehow. Anyway, I can only know what I know. And so the 1960s was a magical time, a time that happened to coincide with my development from a boy into a man.

In *Na Seascaidí*, I write about the 1960s in Ireland, but not as a nostalgic look back at the 'good old days'. At a distance of over half-a-century I am more clear-headed about that momentous period. I see it now as a watershed in the history of our society and of our culture. In fact, 'change' seems too small a word to describe what happened to Ireland. 'Transformation' is closer, but 'revolution' is probably the most apt term.

Through a combination of personal memory and a little research, I try to make sense of it all. My blog may seem random and even a bit wacky. Perhaps each article is like a piece of a jigsaw, the overall design of which is a little foggy at the moment. Maybe in the end it will form some sort of coherent picture.

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[1] Fergal Tobin, *The Best of Decades: Ireland in the 1960s* (Dublin 1984), p. 1.
[2] *Irish Times*, 10 Dec. 2016.

NA SEASCAIDÍ SCÓIPIÚLA ("THE SWINGING SIXTIES")

First published: 24 January 2020

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven![3]

William Wordsworth's famous lines capture the poet's youthful enthusiasm for the French Revolution. They also sum up the attitude of many of us who lived through a more recent rebellion against the old order. I refer to the cultural revolution that took place during the 1960s.

In later life the zeal that Wordsworth felt for the heady days of his youth waned considerably. As the years go by my own thoughts about the 1960s have also changed. Yes, a lot of great things happened during that time, especially in music. But was it all positive?

Historian Arthur Marwick has argued that the sixties cultural revolution altered permanently the "material conditions, lifestyles, family relationships, and personal freedoms for the vast majority of ordinary people".[4] In other words, we are now living in a post-revolutionary world in which the past, i.e. before 1960, really is a 'foreign country'. Does that mean life today is better than it was? Or is it worse?

I entered my teens during those ten astonishing years. In this blog I share my perspective on the 1960s revolution and its impact on Ireland.

[3] J. M. & M. J. Cohen, *The new Penguin dictionary of quotations* (London 1998), p. 465.
[4] Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties Cultural Revolution in Britain France Italy and the United States, c.1958-c.1974* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 14-5.

AN T-EIREABALL FADA ("THE LONG CODA")

First published: 28 January 2020

During the summer of 1968 three pivotal moments left indelible marks on my fifteen-year-old mind: hearing about a politician's death, watching a movie, and listening to a pop song.

After learning that Robert Kennedy had been shot dead I went out into our back yard. Using a magnifying glass to focus the sun's rays, I burnt the date, 6/6/68, into a wooden slat on the side of the garden shed. In July I took the bus into town to see *2001: A Space Odyssey* at the Plaza Cinerama. I was so awe-struck by the film I went back to see it twice within a fortnight. Then in August I heard "Hey Jude" for the first time.

I was, of course, aware of the Beatles before I heard their new single on the radio. A few years earlier, on another visit to the cinema with my father, I had seen them perform "She Loves You" in a colour film of one of their concerts. Whether it was the sight of Paul and George shaking their mop-tops while they "oohed" loudly into the microphone, or hearing those closing "Yeah, yeah" harmonies, I was left giddy with excitement.

By 1967 I was interested in the opposite sex and went to my first dance, a chaste affair run by the Legion of Mary. But my attention was drawn away from the phalanx of pretty girls across the hall by the un-danceable music coming from the sound system. Rather adventurously, the DJ had flipped the Beatles' hit, "Hello Goodbye", to play the B-side. I stood transfixed by the slow pounding rhythm and strange lyrics of "I Am the Walrus". It was both exotic and profound, or so it seemed at the time.

You might think that this background would have prepared me for the wondrous "Hey Jude", but it didn't.

It was a warm afternoon and I was listening to the radio at home during the long summer break from school. That is how I came to hear the new Beatles record - all seven minutes of it. When the record finally ended I was in a state of disbelief. How could a Beatles' song turn into something else just when I expected it to fade? And that "something else" was a coda that went on and on, like a hypnotic mantra.

It felt as if I were on a trip through interesting if familiar territory, when suddenly I was brought into a strange new world - never to resume the original journey. I had no words to express the emotions churning around inside me. But I needed desperately to share the experience with someone who might understand. So I left the house to find a kindred spirit.

I had no plan and no idea whose path I would cross. But almost instinctively I walked in the direction of a friend's house about ten minutes away. I had no intention of knocking on his door but I hoped I would meet him coming in the opposite direction. Perhaps he had been listening to the same radio show and was similarly enraptured by the new Beatles' song.

But I did not see him and eventually I went back home without ever expressing to another soul the wonder I had just encountered.

I still find myself mulling over that summer day in 1968. Maybe all teenagers feel things as intensely as I did, whether half-a-century ago or today. But could it be more than just a case of an impressionable youngster reading too much into a trivial moment? Was there something special, something different, about the 1960s? Something that has turned our society in a different direction to the path it was already on? Just like that long coda in “Hey Jude”?

Ó Riada an cumhachtach ("Ó Riada the magician") 1/4

First published: 04 February 2020

The pop music revolution of the 1960s, spawned in Liverpool and London, spread quickly around the globe. In Britain and the USA, in particular, groups such as the Beatles and the Beach Boys began to change the face of modern music through their own highly inventive and original material. Ireland, as a minor appendage to the larger English-speaking world dominated culturally by these two countries, should have succumbed quickly to this potent new musical form. But we didn't. In this series I explore why the pop juggernaut was at least slowed down when it hit our shores.

Although local bands, such as Them and Taste, enjoyed some success with their own songs, there was no huge upsurge of original pop talent such as could be found in our larger neighbours. Instead Irish audiences were content to enjoy the international hits of the day through the filter of their favourite showbands.

Showbands were essentially slimmed-down versions of the big bands of the 1940s and 1950s. Those fronted by a charismatic singer, such as Brendan Bowyer or Dickie Rock, attracted huge crowds to dancehalls and ballrooms throughout the country. But, with few exceptions such as the Freshmen from Antrim, showbands contributed little creatively to the imported fare they peddled. None produced songwriters remotely equivalent to Ray Davies or Jimmy Webb, or recordings to match *Rubber Soul* or *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme*.

Whatever creative spirit was unleashed in young Irish hearts and minds by the cultural renaissance unfolding off-shore, it was not to be found on the showband scene. Instead it took root in what could be described as Ireland's musical heritage, a heritage largely ignored by those eager to jump on the pop bandwagon.

During the 1950s and early-1960s, many people listened to Irish music in the forms presented by singers and groups such as Bridie Gallagher and the Kilfenora Céilí Band. Through the use of easy-listening orchestral accompaniments and simple three-four tempos, Bridie's records, such as "The Boys From the County Armagh" and "Moonlight in Mayo", were mega-hits at home and abroad. Céilí bands, such as the Kilfenora, used piano and snare drums to beef up their repertoire of traditional tunes and make them danceable for their fans.

But even back then, Irish music was broad enough to also encompass pipers such as Leo Rowsome and sean-nós singers like Joe Heaney. Their music evoked an almost-forgotten Ireland that sounded strange and exotic to the modern ear.

However it would be wrong to regard one strand of Irish music as less genuine or pure than another. If history has taught us anything it is that Irish culture is a mixum-gatherum of many influences, not only from the

ancient past but from more recent sources, such as the Italian baroque and the Broadway stage. We live on a small island that has been visited over many centuries by friend and foe alike, and all have left their mark. But five or six decades ago it would have taken a rare genius to see how the various strands of Irish music could be brought together in a new form that would inspire and excite those who heard it.

Wasn't Ireland fortunate to have just such a prodigy ready and willing to take on the task?

Ó RIADA AN CUMHACHTACH ("Ó RIADA THE MAGICIAN") 2/4

First published: 11 February 2020

Seán Ó Riada was not always Seán Ó Riada. He was born John Reidy in one of Cork city's three maternity hospitals. He inherited his love of music from both sides of the family – his parents were amateur musicians and his mother in particular encouraged her son's burgeoning talent.

The young Reidy learnt how to play piano, violin, and organ. As he became proficient in his chosen subject he developed a taste for jazz. He was an excellent pianist and performed cha-chas and rumbas for the dancers who congregated in Cork's Arcadia ballroom. Under the expert tutelage of Messrs Aloys Fleischmann, father and son, his education progressed through school and university. His natural brilliance impressed all who appreciated the art and craft of music-making. But deep within this prodigious tyro, the strains of Ireland's cultural heritage lay waiting for release.

One of the first signs was Ó Riada's relationship with the Irish language. During the 1950s curiosity turned to obsession when he embraced his native tongue as a vital component of the authentic way of life that he wished to pursue. Ó Riada's quest extended also to his immediate family. He must have caused considerable distress to his wife and son when he decreed that English would no longer be spoken in the home. They should, he told them, waste no time in becoming fluent in Irish. Enthusiasm for Irish quickly led Ó Riada to rekindle his interest in traditional Irish music, of which more later. But, apart from language and music, another aspect of Ireland's heritage held Ó Riada in a tight grip.

Even city folk know about leprechauns, banshees, and pookas, but few people now believe in such things. For Ó Riada, though, the spirit world, wherein dwelt these and other fabulous beings, was just around the corner. Left alone in a strange and dark place, he would quickly feel the hostile presence of spectral forces drawing about him. Whatever religious faith Ó Riada still clung to offered him no consolation, and ghosts and spirits filled him with dread. Music, however, offered some protection. His biographer, Tomás Ó Canainn, observed that

> Ó Riada seemed to be on a higher plane when he played piano – as if he

had gone into another world, where no one could get to him.[1]

Ó Riada was evidently an intelligent man with a logical mind. Yet he firmly believed in the supernatural, and was even convinced that he possessed dark powers of his own. Ó Riada's friend, the poet John Montague, recalled an incident in a hotel bar when Ó Riada predicted that he could trip up a nearby stranger using only the power of his mind. 'Sure enough', wrote Montague, 'the man he had indicated almost fell there and then'.[2]

Ó Riada's unquestioning acceptance of an 'other-world', usually hidden from ordinary mortals, was not so strange in a pre-television age, before superstition was largely dispelled from popular culture. Indeed belief in the 'good people', as domestic fairies were called, was common in rural Ireland up to relatively modern times. But even in the early-19th century scepticism was developing, as illustrated by the dismissal of such beliefs, in a book of ancient customs and traditions, as "the notions of the ignorant".[3] For a half-sceptic like Montague, Ó Riada's "capricious trafficking in magic" was at least partly the result of his addiction to alcohol. No doubt attitudes such as Montague's are 'rational and sensible'.

But could Ó Riada have played his part in slowing down the otherwise unstoppable march of American and British pop music during the 1960s, without his belief in a spiritual realm?

Ó RIADA AN CUMHACHTACH ("Ó RIADA THE MAGICIAN") 3/4

First published: 25 February 2020

Seán Ó Riada launched his new ensemble, Ceoltóirí Chualann, in Dublin's Shelbourne Hotel on 10 September 1961. What Ó Riada called a "folksy chamber orchestra" would turn his vision of Irish traditional music into reality.

The membership was fluid and we cannot be sure who participated in that inaugural concert. But some or all of the following were probably involved. Apart from Ó Riada himself who arranged the music and played the bodhrán, the early line-up of Ceoltóirí Chualann comprised Paddy Moloney (uileann pipes), Michael Tubridy (flute), Seán Potts (tin whistle), John Kelly and Martin Fay (fiddles), Sonny Brogan and Éamon de Buitléar (accordions), and Ronnie McShane (bones).

Harpist Gráinne Yeats reflected later that it was

> the first group which presented solo players who remained soloists, yet also played together in a completely different way from ceilidhe bands.[4]

At first listeners were wary, but they quickly grew to like Ó Riada's new

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[1] Tomás Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His life and work* (Wilton, 2003), p. 19.
[2] *Irish Independent*, 1 Aug. 2019.
[3] T. Crofton Croker, *Researches in the South of Ireland* (London, 1824), p. 99.
[4] Gráinne Yeats, 'The rediscovery of Carolan', in Bernard Harris & Grattan Freyer (eds), *The achievement of Seán Ó Riada* (Ballina, 1981), pp 81-2.

sound. After one of their radio appearances a newspaper critic wrote:

> I soon became accustomed to the unusual combination and arrangements of the Ceoltóirí Chualann. It's impossible to say whether Seán Ó Riada is immensely serious about his musicians, or is having an enormous joke. At all events, the experiment does succeed, the joke does come off.[5]

If this was to be Ó Riada's home-grown alternative to international pop music, it can be seen in hindsight as a pre-emptive strike. On the very evening that Ceoltóirí Chualann made their live debut, a little-known English rock 'n' roll group called the Beatles were performing at Liverpool's Casbah Coffee Club. Twelve months later, almost to the day, they recorded their first single, "Love Me Do", at EMI's studios in Abbey Road. For the next eight years the revivified pop culture they led conquered the world. Meanwhile through their concerts, records, and radio programmes, Ceoltóirí Chualann were fostering a new pride across Ireland in a quite different type of music - a sense of pride already inflamed by Ó Riada's orchestral score to George Morrison's documentary film, *Mise Éire*.

Both the Beatles and Ceoltóirí Chualann lasted only as long as the decade. The English group's swansong, *Let It Be*, was released on 8th May 1970. Seven months later, on December 3rd, Ó Riada announced (in another Dublin hotel, the Hibernian) that "My experiment is finished".[6] And so Ceoltóirí Chualann was disbanded.

Seán Ó Riada loved good music wherever it came from: Europe, South America, or the Middle East. On the other hand he hated the kind of commercially-driven pop that became all-pervasive during the last decade or so of his life. In 1971, as he lay dying in a London hospital, he was tormented by the incessant pop music that the nurses listened to all day on the radio. Almost a decade earlier, not long after he had formed his folk orchestra, he argued fiercely for an indigenous Irish culture that would counteract what he referred to as "an alien materialism".[7]

> Our nation, that was bought with blood, is being sold, spiritually as well as physically, before our own eyes, by our own people… The strongest surviving tradition we have is our music. We must not let it go. And it is up to ourselves to keep it.[8]

And keep it we did. Not only did the Ceoltóirí Chualann sound go down well with the listening public, it inspired new generations to explore their own culture. Traditional Irish music took off in the late-sixties and seventies as musicians like Paddy Moloney, Donal Lunny, and Jim Lockhart developed and expanded Ó Riada's vision with their own groups, the Chieftains, Planxty, and Horslips. In 1987 a three-day festival to honour

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[5] *Irish Independent*, 13 Apr. 1963.
[6] Sam Richards, *Sonic Harvest: Towards Musical Democracy* (Charlbury, Oxford, 1992), p. 12.
[7] Seán Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage* (Portlaoise, 1982), p. 80.
[8] Ibid.

the late composer featured the *Ó Riada Suite*, the first orchestral work by Bill Whelan who later gained lasting fame with *Riverdance*. And the extraordinary creative genius that Ó Riada displayed continues today in the music of the Gloaming, whose experimental arrangements of ancient airs and tunes would surely have delighted him.

Ó RIADA AN CUMHACHTACH ("Ó RIADA THE MAGICIAN") 4/4

First published: 03 March 2020

As a boy, Seán Ó Riada saw a strange woman when he was out walking one evening. As she passed by he noticed that she was floating above the ground. He ran home in terror and his hair began to turn white from that day on.

Such visions, or "aislingí" in Gaelic, are not unknown in Irish history. The 17th-century Munster poet, Aogán Ó Rathaille, described a similar encounter in *Gile na Gile*:

> The Brightness of Brightness I saw in a lonely path,
> Crystal of crystal. Her blue eyes tinged with green.
> Melody of melody, her speech not morose with age,
> The ruddy and white appeared in her glowing cheeks.[9]

Ó Rathaille was not alone. James Fintan Lalor wrote often of the 'island-queen', whom he described as "a lady of soft heart and grateful disposition".[10] For Yeats, such female manifestations represented the "goddesses of ancient Ireland".[11] Indeed, throughout Ireland's history under British rule, poets sometimes depicted their subjugated nation as a woman, variously known as Ériu, Aoibheall, or Caitlín Ní Uallacháin. Tempting as it is in our sceptical age to regard such characters as the product of literary licence or primitive superstition, one thing is clear: whoever it was Seán Ó Riada saw that day, he believed she was real.

When Ó Riada wrote the orchestral score for *Mise Éire* he chose as his main theme the traditional Irish air, "Róisín Dubh". According to the 19th-century historian, George Petrie, both the air and the Gaelic poem it accompanies are of ancient and unknown origin. Although Petrie regarded the poem as a straightforward love song to a real person, its allegorical meaning is evident in the English translation by James Clarence Mangan.[12] For Mangan Róisín Dubh, or "Dark Rosaleen", is Ireland herself and he promises her that:

> But yet... will I rear your throne

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[9] Patrick S. Dineen & Tadhg O'Donoghue (eds.), *The poems of Egan O'Rahilly*, (2nd edn, London, 1911), p. 19.
[10] Thomas Patrick O'Neill, *James Fintan Lalor*, tr. John T. Goulding (Wexford, 2003), p. 132.
[11] W. B. Yeats, *Writings on Irish folklore, legend and myth*, ed. Robert Welch (London, 1993), p. 249.
[12] George Petrie, *The Petrie collection of the ancient music of Ireland* (Dublin, 1855), pp. 93-4.

Again in golden sheen;
'Tis you shall reign, shall reign alone,
My Dark Rosaleen!
My own Rosaleen![13]

Ó Riada captured this Róisín Dubh in the two arrangements of the traditional melody that bookend *Mise Éire*. The first is played on the French horn and opens the film, signifying the awakening of a new spirit in Irish history. The reprise at the end strikes a triumphant note as the full orchestra celebrates the advent of freedom, (or "saoirse"), in majestic fashion.

Although he was frightened by the vision he experienced as a boy, perhaps that mysterious woman remained with him deep in his subconscious mind, inspiring his orchestral masterpiece. Not long before he died Ó Riada told Garech de Brún that he felt his work was done. So when he decided to bring Ceoltóirí Chualann to an end, he may have realised that his time on earth was drawing to a close.

Is it fanciful to imagine that, as death beckoned, Seán Ó Riada remembered Róisín Dubh and realised that he had honoured her in the best way he could, through his music?

[13] Denis F. MacCarthy (ed.), *The book of Irish ballads* (2nd edn, Dublin, 1869), pp. 202-4.

AG RITH I DTREO NA BHFLAITHEAS ("RUNNING TOWARDS HEAVEN")

First published: 18 February 2020

On a cold, dark morning in the winter of 1964-65, I was racing through the snow-covered streets towards the local Catholic church. As an altar boy, I had been given my assignment for the week: the early Mass, Monday to Friday, and it was already coming up to seven o'clock. I couldn't be late on the first day!

For an eleven-year-old boy my responsibilities were pretty serious. When I arrived at the sacristy adjoining the church, I had to whip off my jacket and put on the soutane and surplice which I carried in a black cloth bag thrown over my shoulder. Then I would light the large candles on the altar in preparation for Mass. I also had to make sure the two little glass jugs, or cruets, were filled with water and wine for the ceremony. When everything was ready I returned to the sacristy to await the arrival of the celebrant, usually one of the parish curates.

The priest made his own preparations in another room within the sacristy. Those preparations were a kind of pre-ritual in which he donned the liturgical vestments: the amice, the alb, and the chasuble, all the while praying quietly. When he appeared at the top of the stairs leading from his inner sanctum, that was my cue to lead him in solemn procession onto the side altar where Mass was to be said.

Cold as it was outside, the temperature inside the Church was not much higher. Usually only a few parishioners turned up for Low Mass on a weekday morning. Because it lasted less than thirty minutes, it was hardly worth heating the whole building. The lighting too was rationed, just bright enough to allow worshippers to follow the ceremony in their missals.

After making the sign of the Cross, the celebrant stood facing the altar and uttered the first Latin words of the Mass:

> Introibo ad altare Dei. ("I will go in unto the Altar of God.")

To which I responded:

> Ad Deum, qui laetificat juventutem meam. ("Unto God, who giveth joy unto my youth.")

The ceremony continued in that fashion. The priest intoned his part of the text, and I answered with mine. The rite was conducted in Latin, with a smattering of Greek, and followed very strict rules governing the words and actions of celebrant and assistant. Those rules, or rubrics as they were known, reflected customs and traditions going back many centuries.

For a young boy like me, kneeling at the foot of the altar, listening to the priest speaking the sacred words, his voice falling to a whisper when he reached the Consecration, and aware of the soft murmuring coming from the tiny congregation behind me, it was like being in Heaven. I may have been only dimly aware that something mysterious and wonderful

was unfolding a few feet away. But deep down I realised I was in the presence of Beauty and my heart soared.

Of course I had no idea that everything was soon to change. The familiar window into a divine reality, open since time immemorial, was about to be sealed up. A year earlier, the Second Vatican Council voted to modernise the Mass by allowing the use of vernacular languages instead of Latin. On 4 December 1963 Pope Paul VI made it official. In theory the changes seemed minor. In practice it was a revolution. Within a few years the age-old Roman Catholic Mass was defunct.

That winter's morning I was not just a small boy anxious to be on time for Mass. Without realising it I was actually running towards Heaven, before the gate closed.

BEATHA NÁ BÁS ("LIFE OR DEATH")

First published: 10 March 2020

In June 1965, the government distributed a 55-page booklet to every household in the land. The purpose of the booklet was to advise citizens what to do if Ireland were ever caught in the crossfire of a nuclear exchange between the superpowers, not an unlikely possibility at the time. The Minister of Defence wrote in his introduction: "The risk of nuclear war… may remain for many years". Is it any wonder that people held onto the booklet, which is how I came to have it more than half-a-century later?

The booklet was written entirely in English, but the four words on the front cover were in Gaelic. Across the top was the heading "Cosaint Shibhialta" (Civil Defence), being the name of the official body of volunteers set up during the Cold War to support the emergency services. Two other words were printed in larger typeface underneath. They were "Bás" and "Beatha". For anyone unsure what these meant, a helpful illustration was printed alongside each word.

In the case of "Bás", the accompanying image of a giant mushroom cloud ascending into the sky illustrated the nightmare of a nuclear holocaust. "Beatha" was represented by a drawing of a two-storey house showing how its occupants could survive by sheltering indoors.

Before seeing the booklet I can't recall if I was particularly frightened by the threat of global annihilation. But it was probably the greatest danger facing the planet, or at least that was the perception created by the news media and by popular culture. At the age of twelve, my interest in current affairs was pretty low – the Cuban Missile Crisis went right over my head. And I was too young to have seen any of the Hollywood movies about how easily nuclear conflict could be sparked, films like *Fail Safe* and *Dr. Strangelove*. So the arrival of the booklet was my first exposure to the topic *du jour*. It suggested that the grownups, those in charge of things, were getting worried.

Much of the booklet was devoted to sensible tips on how to turn one's home into a refuge. The advice included stocking up on food, filling the bath with drinking water, and erecting barriers and shelters inside and outside the home. We were warned that anyone unfortunate enough to find themselves outdoors when a nuclear bomb exploded could be killed, even if the blast occurred five miles away. The overall tone of the booklet was what might be called 'mild apocalyptic'. The reassuring language about "getting back to normal" was offset by more sinister terms, often written in capitals, such as "FINAL WARNING", "DO EVERYTHING YOU ARE TOLD BY THE AUTHORITIES", and "TURN YOUR BACK TO THE FLASH".

The dangers confronting us now have proliferated since I was a boy. Terrorism, climate change, global pandemic, these are just a few of the

horrors we are told threaten our civilisation and our very survival as a species. The underlying message is the same as it was back then. To my twelve-year-old mind that message was: be afraid. Our fate, life or death, depended on forces over which we had no control - we as a family, and we as a small country on the edge of Europe.

In 1965, as I leafed through the government's booklet, I knew little about the international tensions that were causing such widespread anxiety. But I did begin to realise an important truth. No worldly authority could protect me or anyone else from evil. All the Irish government could do was warn the people of an approaching peril and urge us to protect ourselves.

Many years later I came across something Jesus said to his followers not long before he died.

> I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me…[14]

No power indeed. After all, aren't we told that Jesus quelled the storm when his disciples feared it would overwhelm their boat? "Who then is this", they said, "that he commands even wind and water, and they obey him?"[15]

If "the ruler of this world" is actually a 'paper tiger', then what I felt instinctively as a child must be true. While it might have seemed like we were alone in the face of extreme danger, we really weren't.

[14] John 14:30
[15] Luke 8:22-25

"ANOIS TEACHT AN EARRAIGH…" ("SPRING IS COMING…")[16]

First published: 17 March 2020

I was 10 years old when my mother took me to see John F. Kennedy. He was of Irish stock and the first Catholic president of the United States of America. Kennedy had been to Ireland before, but in June 1963 he made his only state visit as American president.

While he was in Ireland, Kennedy stayed at the American ambassador's residence in the Phoenix Park. As it happened, we lived about 15 minutes' walk from the park. Not having a car, and located in Dublin's inner city, there was little for a young boy to do on a fine summer's day. I was glad therefore when our family would make the short journey to the park, where we could feed the ducks swimming in the pond, and generally enjoy the wide open spaces. So my mother knew exactly how we could see our distinguished visitor in the flesh without too much effort.

The newspapers printed details of the route the presidential motorcade would take. Upon arrival in Ireland, Kennedy and his entourage were to travel from Dublin Airport along the quays to the ambassador's residence. And so it was. On Wednesday evening, June 26th, Air Force One landed at around 8:00pm. Because it was just after the summer solstice it was bright until nearly 10 o'clock. So tens of thousands of people lined the streets to catch a glimpse of Kennedy as he passed by. My mother, my younger brother, and I found our spot near the park entrance and waited.

We had a good position on the footpath as the cavalcade approached and I could see everything clearly. The American president was sitting in the rear seat of an open-topped limousine. He looked relaxed as he acknowledged the cheers of the crowds gathered to greet him. Alongside him sat the Irish president, Éamon de Valera. The contrast between the two men was stark. Kennedy seemed to represent the promise of the 1960s, a new era of glamour and fun. He looked like a Hollywood star - and he was so young! De Valera, born in the 19th century, was like an unwelcome reminder of Ireland's past, austere and grim. Yet could anyone have imagined that the older man would outlive his younger counterpart?

Around this time we got our first television set. It was black-and-white of course and, because we did not have an aerial on the roof, there was only one station, Telefís Éireann. One Friday evening, less than five months after that memorable day in June, I was watching *The Thin Man*, an American drama series starring Peter Lawford – as it happened a brother-in-law of John F. Kennedy. The programme was interrupted by newsreader Charles Mitchel who announced that the American president had been shot during a visit to Texas. When the programme ended the news came through that Kennedy was dead.

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[16] Douglas Hyde (tr. & ed.), *Songs ascribed to Raftery, being the fifth chapter of the Songs of Connacht*. (New York, c1903), pp. 88-105.

It may be difficult for anyone under fifty to appreciate the sense of hope that lifted the spirits of millions around the world as the Sixties dawned. That hope was based on a feeling that things were going to get better, and that the terrible wars of the recent past would never happen again. In his youth, his intelligence, and his charisma, John F. Kennedy embodied those dreams. That only made his tragic end in November 1963 all the more terrible.

The decade of promise would deliver more bad news as the years went by, whether it was the later assassinations of Kennedy's brother and the civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, the escalation of the war in Vietnam, or the reversal of religious reform that the pope's encyclical *Humanae vitae* seemed to signify. We did not know it then, but the killing of John F. Kennedy was the first sign that the longed for new age would turn out to be nothing more than a mirage.

Yet on that warm June evening, as I gazed at this smiling man who seemed to exude confidence in the future, it was possible to believe that we lived in the best of all possible worlds. So I will always be grateful to my mother for a wonderful memory of a more innocent time, when it seemed that spring had finally come.

IMIRCE OÍCHE A DHÉANAMH ("MAKING A MOONLIGHT FLIT")

First published: 24 March 2020

In the early hours of Monday July 21, 1969, Neil Armstrong became the first human being to walk on the surface of the Moon. How do I know this? Because I saw him do it on live television. Just imagine! Live TV beamed into our home in Dublin from a quarter-of-a-million miles away. In 1969! Beggars belief, doesn't it?

Two years earlier about 350 million TV viewers around the world watched The Beatles perform "All You Need Is Love" in a live satellite broadcast from Abbey Road Studios in London. So the technology required to transmit live television pictures across the planet existed. But successfully carrying out a much longer broadcast from the Moon to the Earth was another matter entirely.

A host of concerned experts were against adding camera equipment to the already burdened space craft. However the US space agency, Nasa, insisted that the additional weight was justified if it allowed everyone to witness an historic moment as it happened. Nasa had long realised that an effective public relations strategy was critical to shaping public opinion and winning political support. Eugene Cernan, commander of the later Apollo 17 mission, called the Nasa strategy "one of the biggest marketing efforts in history".[17]

Through a carefully-designed media campaign, Nasa promoted its astronauts and their families as celebrities to be acclaimed and admired, just like the Beckhams today. Werner von Braun, architect of the rocket technology that enabled the Apollo program, understood why this strategy was necessary. He addressed the media on July 22 1969, just as Apollo 11 was heading back to Earth: "…without public relations and good presentations of these programs to the public, we would have been unable to do it."[18] For Nasa therefore, TV coverage of the moon landing was almost as critical as the mission itself.

Like hundreds of millions of people around the globe, the Bruce family kept the telly on for the many hours of live coverage, courtesy of our local broadcaster. It was not that the grainy black-and-white imagery, plus the soundtrack of beeps, squeaks, and radio chatter between Houston and the astronauts, made for gripping viewing. This was history, and we stuck with it so that we would not miss the important bits. The big moment came when Neil Armstrong manoeuvred himself down the steps of the lunar module and dropped gingerly to the ground. But not *our* ground, the Moon! Needless to say, we were glued to the small screen for that milestone, long after we should have been in bed. But school was closed for

[17] David Meerman Scott & Richard Jurek, *Marketing the Moon: The Selling of the Apollo Lunar Program* (Massachusetts, 2014), p. vii.
[18] Ibid, p. ix.

the summer so we could sleep late next day.

The Irish Times commentary reflected both the incredulity and the wonder felt by millions. TV critic Ken Gray wrote of the "unreality" of what he witnessed. "It is often difficult to believe", he continued, "that what you are watching is not just another edition of *Dr. Who*."[19] The paper's leader writer referred to this "incredible time", and marvelled at the TV images broadcast to the world:

> ...it was not the least of the wonders of the last twelve hours that a message as clear as a call across the street came down from the Moon to the Earth."[20]

Seeing everything as it took place so far away only confirmed the magnitude of Nasa's achievement. Ken Gray put it succinctly: "What would a flight to the Moon be without television?"[21]

The space agency had already been criticised for its inept management of basic radio communications. When Commander Gus Grissom participated in a rehearsal for the Apollo 1 launch at Cape Kennedy in 1967, he became impatient as he waited in the command module for instructions from the control centre. In the recording of the radio traffic from that exercise Grissom can be heard asking several times, "How can we get to the moon if we can't talk between two or three buildings?" Later in the same test he and his two colleagues were killed when fire swept through the module.

This tragic event made it all the more important for the much more complex television broadcast from the Moon to proceed without a hitch. Clearly there could be no guarantees; the Apollo 1 rehearsal demonstrateed that.

In those circumstances it would surely have been prudent for Nasa to prepare a contingency plan, just in case. That would presumably mean recording on film here on Earth a dress rehearsal of the landing, the footage to be used if the live relay broke down. The viewing public would be none the wiser.

No proof that it happened of course. But to quote Britain's Master of the Rolls Lord Denning in a different context, for Nasa - and the US government - no TV pictures would have been "an appalling vista".

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[19] *Irish Times*, 21 Jul. 1969.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

AG DUL CHUIG PICTIÚRLANN ("GOING TO THE CINEMA") 1/2

First published: 31 March 2020

Most Saturday afternoons, from the age of eleven, I used to take the bus into Dublin city centre. O'Connell Street was my bailiwick – a magical, enchanting place at that time. A southsider like me entered via O'Connell Bridge, as wide as the street itself, and that was pretty wide. The first feature to catch the eye was Nelson's Pillar, positioned right in the centre of the boulevard, and by far its tallest structure. Other famous landmarks nearby were the Gresham Hotel, the General Post Office, and Clery's department store.

This last was the focus of O'Connell Street's status as the capital's premier shopping district. If Clery's was Dublin's queen of retail, it was surrounded by the lesser nobility, a wide variety of food emporiums, cafés, jewellers, and high end haberdasheries. Entertainment was plentiful also. Revellers could dance their cares away virtually any night of the week in the Metropole or Clery's ballrooms. But it was the cinemas that drew me to the city centre.

From early childhood, a visit to the cinema with my father was the highlight of the week. Our usual destination was the Grafton near Stephen's Green. The programmes in most of the city's picture houses consisted of one or two full-length feature films. The Grafton, however, was unique in that it presented a continuous programme of short films, newsreels, and cartoons. Anytime from 10:00am onwards, one could enjoy hours of *Speedy Gonzales*, *The Three Stooges*, the *Pathé* newsreel, and many other similar delights. That grounding set me up for my career as a solo cinephile.

Cash was short in those days - not enough in our household to provide me with pocket money. But my duties as a Mass server sometimes paid off. If I were fortunate enough to be asked to serve at a wedding Mass on a Saturday morning, I would receive a tip of maybe ten shillings or even a pound from the best man. That was enough to fund several trips into town, including a visit to the cinema and an ice cream in Cafolla's café. And along O'Connell Street and its offshoots, a plethora of picture houses offered an enticing range of films, from epic Hollywood blockbusters to broad British farces.

The Metropole, the Carlton and the Savoy were the big three in O'Connell Street proper. But a few yards off the main thoroughfare were the Ambassador in Parnell Street, the Adelphi in Abbey Street, the Capitol in Prince's Street, and the Corinthian on Eden Quay. So when I got off the bus I could choose between seven screens, all within a few minutes' walking distance of one another.

In those pre-multiplex times, these picture houses seemed almost like magnificent palaces. In each one an elaborately-uniformed commission-

aire presided over the vestibule from where the box office queue wound its way out onto the street. Smartly-dressed, flashlight-wielding usherettes were on hand to guide patrons to their seats inside the auditorium. Once seated, the audience would chatter away until the lights dimmed and the huge curtains were slowly drawn back for the start of the show.

The licensing arrangements meant that each of the big cinemas had exclusive rights over the latest movie. For instance, *My Fair Lady* with Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison (in Super Panavision!) opened at the Ambassador on October 15th 1965. Such was its popularity with Irish audiences that it ran there until May 5th of the following year. The average ticket price was about ten shillings, but even the cheapest seat was four shillings and six pence, too rich for my pocket. Nevertheless, a reported 300,000 patrons flocked to see the film at the Ambassador, which for those six-and-a-half months was the only cinema allowed to screen it.

One of my favourite venues was the Carlton, located opposite the Gresham Hotel. This cinema specialised in British horror, with productions from Hammer Films or its main rival Amicus, as the regular fare. The programme changed each week, so there was always a new double bill of the latest Dracula or Frankenstein chillers to lure me into town.

I also frequented the Capitol, which had several balconies. The higher up I was prepared to climb, the less I had to pay for my ticket. From the front row in the 'gods', as the top tier was known, I could peer down from a vertiginous height into the well of the auditorium. But usually I was focused on the screen. One memorable visit occurred when I went to see a revival of *The Longest Day* on Saturday June 6th 1964, the twentieth anniversary of the D-Day landings depicted in the film.

My cinema memories derive from a golden time before the destruction of Nelson's Pillar in March 1966. After that O'Connell Street went into a slow decline as one cinema and retail store after another was closed down or demolished. So I feel lucky to have had the freedom to make my own way through the centre of my native city, when it was safe and pleasurable for a young boy to do so.

AG DUL I BHFEABHAS? ("GETTING BETTER?") 1/3

First published: 07 April 2020

As a young teenager I took the music I listened to for granted. I assumed that the quality of the great pop coming from Britain and America was normal, that it would continue to evolve in both complexity and appeal and yet remain accessible to my non-expert ear.

The Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby" and "Tomorrow Never Knows" managed to combine musical experimentation with widespread popularity. *Revolver*, the album on which these tracks appeared, went straight to number one in the UK album charts on 13th August 1966. It stayed at the top spot for another six weeks. This success was replicated around the world. By the end of the year sales of the album exceeded 1m in the USA alone.

Heavyweight musicians and commentators saw the Beatles as elevating pop music into a new artistic form. Following the release of *With The Beatles*, William Mann, the classical music critic of *The Times*, acclaimed Lennon & McCartney as "the outstanding English composers of 1963", even comparing them to Gustav Mahler.[22] Quite a panegyric given that two giants of British music, Benjamin Britten and William Walton, had major works published that year.

In 1967, Derek Jewell, jazz critic of *The Sunday Times*, described *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* as "a tremendous advance even in the increasingly adventurous progress of the Beatles". They were, he argued, "using their unique freedom in the pop world to raise the levels of their idiom and enlarge its vocabulary in most exciting ways".[23]

In a TV documentary, also from 1967, composer Leonard Bernstein described pop music as "mostly trash", but about five per cent of it, he asserted, "claims the attention of every thinking person". He then sang the opening bars of the Beatles' song, "Got To Get You Into My Life", before proclaiming "that could almost be by Schumann; it's so expansive and romantic".[24]

The Beatles were not alone in leading pop into ever-greater musical complexity. Other acts broke conventions without alienating their followers. These include Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, the Beach Boys, and Pink Floyd. During the 1960s they all produced top 10 albums that broke the mould of what had been considered, until recently, mainstream popular music.

Boundaries were being breached in other musical genres as well. In the world of movie soundtracks the lush orchestral music of the Hollywood epic was giving way to the quirky, avant-garde sounds of John Barry,

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[22] *Times*, 27 Dec. 1963.
[23] *Sunday Times*, 4 Jun. 1967.
[24] David Oppenheim, *Inside Pop: The Rock Revolution* (CBS, 1967).

Ennio Morricone, and György Ligeti. The first two composed music especially for the big screen. The last, however, was a little-known composer of modernist classical music until Stanley Kubrick co-opted several of his pieces for the soundtrack of *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

In previous posts, I have argued that Seán Ó Riada reconstructed and revived an authentic form of indigenous Irish music that competed with international pop. Nevertheless, like many musically-aware youngsters in Ireland at the time, I was excited by the new wave of what was increasingly referred to as 'progressive pop' or 'progressive rock'. To my ears, the new music, whether it came from Cream's *Wheels of Fire* or Morricone's score from *For a Few Dollars More*, seemed to open up a new world that was strangely exciting but also comfortingly familiar. When I listened to a song like the Beatles' "Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds", I felt as if I had always known it.

Although at the time I simply enjoyed the fruits of the 1960s musical revolution as they appeared, the passage of more than half-a-century since then only emphasises how truly remarkable that brief period was. All the more so because the promise implicit in the Beatles' song, "Getting Better", faded so quickly. Instead of continuing to evolve in the same way that classical music had in the 19th century, or jazz in the 20th, the dynamic innovation - so characteristic of the best of 1960s pop - ended with the decade.

AG DUL I BHFEABHAS? ("GETTING BETTER?") 2/3

First published: 14 April 2020

As I was enjoying the pop music of the 1960s, I did not think too much about how records actually came into being. I don't mean the physical discs themselves, whether 45 or 33⅓ rpm, but the music that emerged from my record player or the radio. It was not until later that I began to appreciate that there were two separate processes involved.

First, someone had to compose the melody and lyrics of a song. That might be a single person, like Paul Simon, or a duo such as John Lennon and Paul McCartney. If these musicians had lived before the recording era, their songs would have reached the mass market in the form of sheet music. A talented person who could read music might then perform the songs at the piano. So composition and performance were two distinct processes.

However, long before the 1960s that had all changed. By then the public didn't have to learn how to translate musical notation into sound. They could listen to a recording of the song instead. Of course that usually meant a pop star not only having to create a new song, he also had to rehearse and record it in a studio, with a sound engineer and a producer there to oversee the process. From start to finish, making an album-full of

songs could take many weeks or even months of work.

By the 1960s, the record industry had become a highly profitable business and a top selling LP could make a lot of money for those involved in its creation, whether producers, executives, or the musicians themselves. Given the high stakes, it would be surprising if much was left to chance when a new record was being made.

One problem faced by record companies was that by and large the young pop stars they signed up could not play their instruments very well. So professional, musically-literate musicians were often hired to play on the recordings instead. In the USA, the same small band of musical pros played on many of the hits of the day, including The Byrds' "Mr. Tambourine Man" and Sonny & Cher's "The Beat Goes On". And they did not simply follow the notes on the page, they also contributed to the arrangements. For instance, bassist Carole Kaye came up with the introductory guitar notes she played on Glen Campbell's recording of "Wichita Lineman".

But it was not just the pop stars' poor musical skills that had to be masked. Their ability to write high quality original material was not helped by the other demands they faced. For the first few years of their fame, the Beatles were obliged to follow a hectic schedule of recording, touring, and public relations work that could not have left much time for writing new songs. On their early albums, they got round this by mixing cover versions with original compositions. But how did they manage to release so many recordings featuring only their own music?

One approach adopted by the Beatles was to 'borrow' ideas from their contemporaries, although they usually stopped short of outright plagiarism. At a 1966 press conference in Los Angeles, Paul McCartney was pretty forthright: "We pinch as much from other people as they pinch from us". Among several of the more blatant "pinches" identified by *Rolling Stone* magazine were the opening guitar riff from the Beatles' hard rock version of "Revolution", which Lennon & McCartney took from Pee Wee Crayton's 1954 single, "Do Unto Others".[25] While this was all pretty harmless, some sceptics go further and question the authorship of the Beatles' original compositions.

In his video documentary, *Did The Beatles Write All Their Own Music?* Mike Williams examines the making of *Rubber Soul*. He argues that the supposed schedule left insufficient time for the fourteen original songs on the album, plus a double A-sided single, to be written, rehearsed, recorded, and released by early-December 1965. He suggests that the deadline could only have been met if the process had begun much earlier

[25] *Rolling Stone*, 'Beatles' 5 Boldest Rip-Offs', 23 Dec. 2015 [https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/beatles-5-boldest-rip-offs-54145/], 29 Feb. 2023.

than October 12th, the generally acknowledged start-date for the recording sessions. But as the Beatles were filming and touring before then, he believes that session musicians were already in the studio laying down the instrumental tracks under the direction of producer George Martin. All the Beatles had to do to finish the recording was to add their vocals, a task easily accomplished within the time remaining.

This scenario raises a highly contentious issue. For Williams' hypothesis to be true, all sixteen songs would have had to be written long before the Beatles arrived in the studio. As this would not have been possible based on the official timeline, he concludes that ghost writers were brought in to create the material under the supervision of George Martin.

Is such an idea too far-fetched to possibly be true?

AG DUL I BHFEABHAS? ("GETTING BETTER?") 3/3

First published: 28 April 2020

As the 1960s gave way to the Seventies, it seemed that bands like Pink Floyd, Yes, and Emerson Lake & Palmer would continue to innovate and experiment without sacrificing popular appeal. However they were soon sidelined by punk, and the prospect of pop music evolving into a distinctive new art form ended. It did evolve though, but in the commercial rather than the musical sense.

No sooner had the Beatles split than the music revolution they led became transformed into a marketable product, such as McDonald's or Coca Cola. Like those two global brands, pop music began to follow a formula that would appeal to successive generations of consumers through its consistent and reliable sameness. By identifying and isolating the key elements of hits like "Penny Lane" or "Waterloo Sunset", a talented individual could construct his or her own up-to-date variant. Those elements combined the melodic hooks, guitar/piano riffs, and steady beat of the best Sixties pop, with quirky yet appealing personalities similar to those of its most successful exponents. The result was a template for commercial success that has made multi-millionaires of numerous pop-stars, from Elton John and Abba in the late-20th century, to Coldplay and Lady Gaga in the 21st.

So, far from being the home of musical invention, the pop music industry of the last fifty years has drawn on the wellspring of inspiration created in the 1960s - Leonard Bernstein's "five per cent".

If one person can be identified as the source of that wellspring it is Brian Wilson, whom Beatles' producer George Martin lauded as the "living genius of pop music". Like the Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Wilson could not contain the profusion of music that bubbled up within him and which, as he explained to Martin in 1997, "wants to blow right

out of my chest".[26]

His magnum opus was the Beach Boy's album, *Pet Sounds*, the making of which Wilson oversaw and directed, much as Orson Welles did with his movie *Citizen Kane*. Wilson was inspired to make *Pet Sounds* after listening to the new Beatles release, *Rubber Soul*, in December 1965. Afterwards he vowed to his wife Marilyn that he would "make the greatest rock album ever made".[27]

Mike Williams has argued convincingly that George Martin took on a much more significant role in the production of *Rubber Soul* than is generally accepted. According to Williams, he did not merely produce the album. Martin, he claims, also hired songwriters and session musicians to create the songs and lay down the backing tracks in the studio while the Beatles were on tour. Later, John, Paul, George, and Ringo added their vocals to finish the record in time for its scheduled release date.

A few months later, Brian Wilson actually followed this process in the making of *Pet Sounds*. However he went one step further by composing all the music himself. With the Beach Boys on tour without him, Wilson hired Tony Asher, an advertising copywriter, to add lyrics to his compositions. Wilson also arranged the music, hired the Wrecking Crew to record the instrumental backing tracks, and then brought in his bandmates to add their vocals to the mix. Even if one grants to George Martin the elevated status of mastermind behind one of the landmark recordings of the 1960s, Brian Wilson's achievement on *Pet Sounds* stands supreme.

There is a caveat however. *Pet Sounds* was not the result of naked unstoppable genius, like Beethoven's 5th symphony or Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Brian Wilson conceived and executed his masterpiece while under the influence of a variety of powerful and illegal drugs, most notably the hallucinogenic, LSD. Such was his abuse of these chemicals that his mind was permanently damaged and his creative juices never flowed as freely again.

This is the legacy of the 1960s' cultural revolution. Pop music that seemed fresh and vibrant was really the product of either deception or drugs. While, at their best, the resulting sounds were often sublime, they could not be sustained for long given their shaky foundations - only to the end of the decade as it turned out.

Nevertheless, during those few golden years, the magic conjured up by the Beatles, the Beach Boys and others enchanted an entire generation and, for a time, persuaded me that things could only get better.

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[26] 'Brian Wilson and George Martin in studio', *YouTube* (https://youtu.be/CnVyCuc9_P8), accessed 25 Apr 2020.

[27] Charles L. Granata, Tony Asher, *Wouldn't It Be Nice: Brian Wilson and the Making of the Beach Boys' Pet Sounds* (Chicago, 2017), p. 48.

TOSAÍONN AN RÉABHLÓID, ("THE REVOLUTION BEGINS") 1/3

First published: 21 April 2020

Novelist Evelyn Waugh, author of *Brideshead Revisited*, was a Roman Catholic convert who spent his last years trying to save the Latin Mass from oblivion. Not long before he died in 1966, he became despondent at the prospect of the authorised changes in liturgical practice, which he referred to as "the novelties about to be introduced". In a letter to John Carmel Heenan, archbishop of Westminster, Waugh declared that "church-going is now a bitter trial".[28]

By 1980, the full extent of the loss was clear to another English writer, Michael Davies. "Pope Paul VI", he wrote, "presided over and authorised a liturgical revolution which has destroyed the Roman Mass – the greatest treasure of the Latin Church and possibly the greatest achievement of Western civilisation."[29]

As a young boy back in the 1960s I accepted life as it happened. It was many years before I realised that I wasn't the only Irish Roman Catholic to feel bereft at the extinction of the Tridentine rite. I found out that the most senior churchman in Dublin had tried to stall the advent of the New Mass. At that time I was only dimly aware of the fearsome archbishop McQuaid, and I doubt that I ever met the man. The only opportunity for a personal encounter would have been my Confirmation ceremony in 1964. But the archbishop was probably away in Rome at the Second Vatican Council because, if he had administered the sacrament that day, I think I would remember him!

John Charles McQuaid was a brilliant student and he particularly loved Latin. As a schoolboy at Blackrock College he achieved first place in Ireland in the Latin paper of the Junior Grade examination. His grade was 98%. He continued to excel as a third-level student at UCD, gaining a first-class honours degree in Classics, Latin being one of his top subjects. So when he stood up at the Second Vatican Council to deliver his maiden address, it is hardly surprising that he defended the continued use of Latin in the Mass. But McQuaid's stance was not based simply on linguistic preference.

When the Council got underway the archbishop was dismayed at the direction some of the other bishops wished to take the Catholic Church. They were trying to alter or even ditch the Tridentine Mass. They saw it as a barrier to reuniting Roman Catholicism with the other Christian denominations. Therefore it had to be removed. This policy, known as Ecumenism, was the stated goal of senior Vatican figures, including the man

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[28] Waugh to Heenan, 3 Jan. 1965, in Alcuin Reid (ed.), *A bitter trial: Evelyn Waugh and John Carmel Cardinal Heenan on the liturgical changes* (London, 2011), p. 71.

[29] Michael Davies, *Liturgical Revolution, Vol. 3: Pope Paul's New Mass* (Kansas City, 1980), p. 69.

who launched the Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII. When McQuaid realised that the Council was considering some kind of 'joint worship' between Catholics and Protestants, he told a fellow bishop that the proposal was "altogether repugnant to me".[30]

McQuaid found the very idea of a rapprochement between his Church and the other Christian faiths to be intolerable. Notwithstanding the ecumenical direction of the Church, he continued to reiterate traditional, pre-conciliar teaching on the status of non-Catholics. In his Lenten Pastoral of 1968, for instance, McQuaid referred to "the tragic revolt (which is incorrectly called the Reformation), [and which] succeeded in breaking the unity of the Church".[31]

For McQuaid, Luther's Reformation was not an historic event - it was a current threat. If Ecumenism was the goal of the Council, he realised that allowing the Latin Mass to perish would hasten its arrival. How could he prevent this, and at the same time remain obedient to the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church? That was the challenge he set for himself: to outfox his opponents without becoming a rebel himself.

TOSAÍONN AN RÉABHLÓID ("THE REVOLUTION BEGINS") 2/3

First published: 05 May 2020

John Charles McQuaid is not an obvious candidate for the underdog in this story; far from it. But that is what he turned out to be.

As archbishop of Dublin from 1940 to 1972, McQuaid presided over the largest Roman Catholic diocese in Ireland. According to the 1961 census, the total population of the greater Dublin area was just over 718,000. Of those, more than ninety-two per cent were members of his flock. But the archbishop's power and influence were not based simply on the size of his patch.

As the nation's capital city, Dublin was home to the main public and private organs of the state. These included the national print and broadcast media, centres of education such as Trinity College, and of course the major government departments. McQuaid believed that his ecclesiastical authority extended over all of these bodies, and few demurred. In March 1965, the Minister for External Affairs, Frank Aiken, sought the archbishop's permission to attend a Lutheran service in Dublin. McQuaid acceded only on condition that the minister took no active part in the ceremony. That was the way things were done in Ireland just a few decades ago.

Yet, despite his power and prestige, archbishop McQuaid found himself fighting a rearguard action in his attempts to save the traditional Mass. At first he must have been confident that he could follow the Church's new

[30] McQuaid to Staffa, 6 Oct. 1964 (Dublin Diocesan Archives, AB8/VC/XLV/9b).
[31] *Irish Press*, 'Lenten Pastoral: Spiritual renewal only by one true faith', 12 Mar. 1968.

policy, while simultaneously preserving his favoured Latin rite. But as the years went by he became more and more isolated in his devotion to the old Mass.

The Second Vatican Council voted overwhelmingly to permit the vernacular to be used in the Mass, but it was never made compulsory. Theoretically, therefore, McQuaid could have kept Latin in the liturgy. On the other hand, the pope made it clear that he wanted the new Mass to be said in the languages of the people. So the archbishop was never going to defy papal authority. But he saw a loophole. Although English was the spoken language of most Irish people, the first 'official' language was Gaelic. And there was a tiny, but loud, Gaelic-speaking minority among the capital's Catholics. These Gaeilgeoirí, as they were known, would have to be catered for.

So McQuaid instituted an Irish-language Mass in each parish every Sunday. It annoyed a lot of priests and laypeople who could hardly speak the language. But it gave the archbishop a pretext to make the same concession to Latin Mass-lovers like himself. McQuaid had put one of his senior lieutenants, Monsignor Patrick Boylan, in charge of implementing the liturgical reforms. Because Boylan and his team approved the Gaelic Mass, the archbishop expected the same result when he proposed one Latin Mass each Sunday across the diocese. But Boylan objected because he saw no public demand for it. The problem was that, even though they far outnumbered Dublin's Gaeilgeoirí, those who wanted to keep the Latin Mass were nothing like as vocal in their demands.

Maybe McQuaid foresaw this because in 1962, just before the Vatican Council opened proceedings, he commissioned a survey of Catholic opinion in his diocese. Among its findings was a huge level of support for the status quo, including the use of Latin in the Mass.[32] But five years later the archbishop's survey carried little weight. Besides, the survey also found that most Catholics did what the Church told them to.[33] And whatever about their archbishop's views, Dubliners could see that the Church wanted the Mass changed. So Boylan prevailed and McQuaid withdrew his proposal.

In Dublin, as in almost every diocese around the world, the Tridentine Mass was extinguished and replaced by the *Novus Ordo Missae*, Pope Paul VI's New Mass. McQuaid was made to retire when he reached seventy-five. During his last years he was allowed to celebrate his preferred Latin Mass, but only when he was alone and never with a congregation present.

Apart from a young, naïve altar boy and an elderly cleric, did anyone

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[32] Bruce Francis Biever, 'Religion, culture, and values: a cross-cultural analysis of motivational factors in native Irish and American Irish Catholicism' (Ph.D thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1965), pp. 241, 462.
[33] Ibid, p. 472.

really care about the passing of the ancient form of Catholic worship more than fifty years ago?

Maybe not, but perhaps a better question is: did the Tridentine Mass actually matter?

TOSAÍONN AN RÉABHLÓID ("THE REVOLUTION BEGINS") 3/3

First published: 12 May 2020

Throughout the 1960s the controversy over the Vatican Council's liturgical reforms was a minor hiccup in world affairs. The space race, political assassinations in America, and the war in Vietnam, were just three of the issues that dominated the news media, leaving little room for the planned abolition of the Tridentine Mass.

Of course the matter was of great interest to the religious establishment. Archbishop McQuaid tried to frustrate the changes, partly because he loved the old rite. He was also worried that the New Mass would legitimise the Reformation and undermine what he saw as the true faith. His Protestant counterparts, on the other hand, were delighted that Rome was at last catching up with Martin Luther and Thomas Cranmer.

Then, in July 1971, a petition sent to the pope by some high profile individuals brought the matter back into the headlines.[34] The signatories were horrified at the plan to "obliterate" the Mass by the end of the year. While they acknowledged the religious dimension, their objection was based on aesthetic grounds.

> The rite in question, in its magnificent Latin text, has also inspired a host of priceless achievements in the arts - not only mystical works, but works by poets, philosophers, musicians, architects, painters and sculptors in all countries and epochs. Thus, it belongs to universal culture as well as to churchmen and formal Christians.

It is likely that the signatories were thinking of artefacts such as Chartres Cathedral, Bach's *Mass in B minor*, and Leonardo's *The Last Supper*, all of which were inspired directly or indirectly by the Latin rite. It was this long tradition of artistic enrichment that motivated so many well-known figures to appeal to the pope. Among the petition's fifty-plus signatories were violinist Yehudi Menuhin, novelist Agatha Christie, and art historian Kenneth Clark. They included people of all faiths and none. The petitioners urged the pope "to allow the Traditional Mass to survive, even though this survival took place side by side with other liturgical forms."

By placing the Tridentine Mass in the context of "universal culture", the petitioners were arguing that the Vatican's plan would affect everyone, not just Roman Catholics. If the plan went ahead they believed that the world would be deprived of a significant cultural treasure.

But surely there was a more profound question: would the *spiritual*

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[34] *Times*, 6 Jul. 1971.

repercussions also be "universal" in their impact on people everywhere, not just Roman Catholics but Hindus, atheists, etc. too?

The decision to replace the Latin rite with the *Novus Ordo Missae* was presented by the Church as a sacrifice it was prepared to make for a greater cause. That greater cause was summed up by Pope John XXIII in a speech he made a month before the Vatican Council opened.[35] He saw the Council as representing "for the first time in history… all the peoples and nations" of the world. Through the Council, they would "cooperate in the triumph of peace to make earthly existence more noble, more just, and more meritorious for everyone."

The pope's objective went far beyond reconciling Catholics and Protestants. If his vision were realised the result would be "to cure and heal the scars of two conflicts which have profoundly changed the face of every country". His goal was nothing less than the replacement of international strife and warfare with universal love.

On 25 June 1967, a milestone in television broadcasting took place. For the first time a live programme, entitled "Our World", was beamed around the globe via satellite, reaching a potential audience of 400 million people in 5 continents. The Beatles took part, performing "All You Need Is Love", a new song written especially for the occasion. It is hard to find a more fitting summation of the foursome's role in that broadcast than historian Arthur Marwick's description of the Beatles as "the voice of their age".[36]

If the Beatles' led the cultural shift that altered our world forever, then the revolution began on September 11th 1962.[37] On that date the group recorded "Love Me Do", the single that launched their career. That was also the day on which John XXIII proclaimed his vision of universal love.

The Mass stood in the way of this worldwide spiritual upheaval. That is why it had to go.

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[35] John XXIII, "Radio message to all the Christian faithful one month before the opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council", 11 Sep. 1962, tr. Éamon Kiernan. *Holy See* (http://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/messages/pont_messages/1962.index.html), accessed 9 May 2020.

[36] Marwick, *Sixties Cultural Revolution*, pp. 458-9.

[37] According to a footnote on page 116 of Thomas E. Uharriet, *The Memoirs of Billy Shears* (2018), "11 September 1962 was the date that the Illuminati selected to launch its war on Christianity."

NA SEASCAIDÍ FADA ("THE LONG SIXTIES")

First published: 24 October 2020

What do I mean by the "1960s"? Surely the answer is obvious? It's a 10-year span starting on January 1st 1960 and ending on December 31st 1969. But do major happenings, like those that make up a far-reaching cultural revolution, fall neatly into a ten-year period with an arbitrary starting point?

Watershed moments such as the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand or the fall of the Berlin Wall did not occur precisely at the turn of a new century or decade. These and other pivotal events - rather than dates in a calendar - are often used to frame historical epochs. For instance, some academic studies of British history consider the "long eighteenth century" as having begun with the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688, with the end point set at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. Although it redefines the 18th century as a period of 127 years rather than one hundred, this approach arguably makes for a more coherent way of exploring the past.

I believe we need to apply a similar, looser definition to the 1960s if we are to understand the cultural earthquake that continues to shape the world we live in today. It's not as if some demented genie emerged from a bottle at the stroke of midnight on December 31st 1959 and disappeared again exactly a decade later. The things I have written about here may have occurred during the 1960s, but many either originated or were planned in previous times. Other connected events may even have taken place later. So, in their impact on Ireland, at least, I believe there is a case to be made for a 'long 1960s', covering maybe 15 years.

I would set the starting point precisely as 28th October 1958. This was the date of John XXIII's election as pope. As I have argued in a previous post, the new pope's policy of *Aggiornamento* ("Modernisation") was a critical factor in the cultural upheaval I have written about.[38]

As for an end date, there are several candidates. One is the retirement as president in June 1973 of Éamon de Valera. For many years, de Valera represented the traditional values threatened during the 1960s. So with his departure from public office, another bulwark against the encroachment of foreign influence on Ireland was finally gone. One of the few other public figures to match de Valera's influence was Archbishop John Charles McQuaid. His death in April 1973 also signalled the official passing of a bygone era. But there is a third development to consider.

I remember the 1960s as a time of uninterrupted progress and improvement. With the dawn of the 1970s, that promise looked set to continue. However reality set in when the oil crisis struck in the autumn of 1973. By the end of that year, higher prices and rising inflation led to a severe reduction in living standards. More importantly, from a psychological

[38] Tosaíonn an réabhlóid, ("The revolution begins") 1/3 on page 31.

point of view, my confidence that life would continue to get better was badly shaken. As an academic economist has reflected:

> The mood of despair in Ireland and the western world was palpable, with few expecting recovery any time soon.[39]

These two events: the papal election in 1958 and the oil crisis of 1973, mark the beginning and the end of what I regard as 'the long sixties'. Because both were international in origin, they symbolise Ireland's status, then and now, as a small state vulnerable to the sweep of global developments. But any suggestion that this country must inevitably give way to international trends would be wrong.

In previous posts I have described how two very different individuals, Seán Ó Riada and Archbishop John Charles McQuaid, tried to thwart key elements of the cultural revolution: religion and music.[40] They may not have succeeded, but they did try. Another of these 'awkward types' will be the subject of my next post.

[39] *Irish Times*, 9 Oct 2017.

[40] Ó Riada an cumhachtach ("Ó Riada the magician") 1/4 on page 10 & Tosaíonn an réabhlóid, ("The revolution begins") 1/3 on page 31.

SAOIRSE NA TÍRE, SAOIRSE AN DUINE ("NATIONAL FREEDOM, PERSONAL FREEDOM")

First published: 31 October 2020

During the 1960s money was scarce. So summer holidays anywhere – Ireland or abroad - were beyond our family's means. The only destination in continental Europe I knew anything about was the pilgrimage town of Lourdes in southwest France. And that didn't sound like a fun place.

If the prospect of a sun holiday on the Costa del Sol seemed remote, I wasn't completely indifferent to what was going on Europe. In March 1965 Ireland's Butch Moore sang "Walking the Streets in the Rain" in the Eurovision Song Contest. Like many others I was glued to our black-and-white telly when the contest was broadcast live from Naples. Right up to the end of the decade I paid close attention as year after year Dickie Rock, Sean Dunphy, et al tried and failed to win the big prize. Eventually, in 1970, a demure teenager from Derry named Dana beat the likes of Mary Hopkin and Julio Iglesias to the top spot.

As a youngster my interest in Europe began and ended with pop music. So I knew nothing about Taoiseach Sean Lemass' plan for Ireland to join the European Economic Community, better known as the Common Market. Although we were finally admitted in 1973, Ireland had been trying to get in since 1961. So, as writer Fergal Tobin explained, "The idea that we were on the threshold of European membership was a constant for most of the decade."[41]

If I had been older I probably would have seen the prospect of joining Europe as yet another positive at a time of unbounded optimism. Ireland under the Lemass government was tasting economic success for the first time since we gained our independence. But the good times would continue only if Britain and Ireland entered the EEC together.

Forty years earlier Ireland had broken free politically from the United Kingdom. But even after independence the Irish economy was dominated by our more powerful neighbour. Britain kept us afloat financially by importing most of our agricultural produce. On top of that, the two countries shared what was in essence a common currency. Until the 1970s the English pound was accepted in our shops on the same basis as the Irish equivalent. So if the UK entered the Common Market, Ireland had to follow suit.

An Irish economist named Raymond Crotty understood the dilemma. But he was not just an economist. Crotty described himself also as "radical and nationalist".[42] So although he recognised the material benefits of EEC membership, he believed the price was too high. In May 1962 he was reported as stating that:

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[41] Tobin, *Best of Decades*, p. 53.

[42] *Irish Times*, 10 Apr. 1987.

> In Ireland it [is] all the more remarkable that a people renowned for their centuries-long struggle for independence should be now ready to surrender a large measure of this independence [to a] European super state.[43]

For Crotty this was a defining moment in Ireland's history. Would we trade our sovereignty for continued affluence? More specifically he wondered why a country with Ireland's experience of subjugation would want to join a grouping of ex-colonial powers, such as Belgium and Italy. Surely, he thought, we had much more in common with places like South America, Africa, and Asia, that had a similar history to our own?

Raymond Crotty's questions were answered on 10 May 1972 when an overwhelming majority of voters approved a momentous addition to the Irish Constitution. Henceforth the provisions of that document would be subordinate to the Treaty of Rome, the EEC's founding charter.

Ireland was joining the First World - not the Third – to sup from the big boys' table. We had swapped the seemingly abstract principles of national sovereignty for the immediate benefits of EEC membership.

Composer Seán Ó Riada died before the 1972 referendum but he shared Crotty's dismay at the direction Ireland took during the 1960s. In his posthumously-published *Our Musical Heritage*, he was scathing in his judgement:

> Our nation, that was bought with blood, is being sold, spiritually as well as physically, before our own eyes, by our own people.[44]

Ireland's government, supported by its citizens, had made material prosperity its overarching objective. Nothing would stand in its way - not even the freedoms fought for and won barely half-a-century before.

[43] *Irish Times*, 10 May 1962.
[44] Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, p. 80.

AG DUL CHUIG PICTIÚRLANN ("GOING TO THE CINEMA") 2/2

First published: 08 November 2020

Although I was a frequent cinema-goer during the 1960s, it was impossible to see every movie that came to town. Some cinemas, like the Carlton, changed their programmes every week. Others, such as the Ambassador, charged top dollar for the big money-spinners, e.g. *My Fair Lady*, making them unaffordable for an impoverished schoolboy like me. Nevertheless, time and cash permitting, I kept up as best I could with the latest productions from Hollywood and British studios.

Many of these films focused on some aspect of World War II. Audiences could not get enough of films like *The Guns of Navarone*, *The Longest Day*, or *The Desert Fox*. One commentator has suggested that the enduring popularity of World War II on celluloid is due to the subject's perceived "moral certainties".[45] In the 1960s there was no doubting who the heroes were. The movies I saw were made by the victors, i.e. America and Britain, and so the Germans and Japanese were always portrayed as the 'enemy'.

Recently I watched one of the few World War II epics I missed the first time around. *Is Paris Burning?* tells the story of the liberation of the French capital from Nazi rule. The title reflects the orders issued by Adolf Hitler to destroy the city lest it fall into Allied hands. It's no plot spoiler to confirm that Paris survived Hitler's threat.

The movie is set in the late summer of 1944 as the War turned against Germany. What we don't see to any great extent is what life was like for ordinary Parisians before the liberation. So other sources are needed to fill the gap.

Allan Mitchell, in his study of the Nazi occupation of Paris, provides vivid insights into the four-and-a-half years of German rule.[46] One of the first things the occupiers did after they arrived was hang huge banners bearing propagandistic slogans at prominent sites like the Eiffel Tower. They also imposed restrictions on citizens' movements, but because these were constantly changing they caused confusion as well as frustration. When food shortages developed, people had to queue outside shops in order to buy the essentials they needed. As they lost faith in the impartiality of the media, Parisians were prone to sometimes wild rumours about the progress of the War and the prospect of rescue by the Allies. Then there were the collaborators and snitches, ready to inform the new rulers about any infringements committed by their neighbours.

After watching *Is Paris Burning?* and reading Mitchell's book, I could see the parallels with present-day Ireland. Like those Parisians, we now live with constantly-changing restrictions on movement, are often com-

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[45] *Guardian*, 17 Jul 2014.

[46] Allan Mitchell, *Nazi Paris: The History of an Occupation, 1940-1944* (New York, 2008), pp 13-9.

pelled to queue outside shops, and cannot avoid the many electronic signs urging us to "join the fight against Covid-19" and the like. In addition, anyone who does not wear a face mask on public transport or who hosts large gatherings indoors risks being reported to the authorities by their fellow citizens. Media bias is also an issue. The adherence by journalists to the government line on the pandemic has gone mostly unnoticed by the general public, although there has been some criticism by a few elected politicians.[47]

There is a fundamental difference, however, between Paris in the 1940s and Ireland in 2020. During the Second World War there was a clearly identifiable enemy against whom the people could unite. The Nazis were distinct and different and Parisians wanted them gone. Sadly there is no similar unity of perception today in Ireland.

Yes, there is general agreement that we face a profound and unprecedented threat. But we are divided on the nature of that threat. For some, it is a lethal virus than can destroy lives unless we all follow government regulations. For others, it is the same government that is causing irreparable damage to the social and economic fabric of the country through its disproportionate response to the pandemic.

As I pondered a resolution to this dilemma, I took some solace from the final scenes of *Is Paris Burning?* The streets are thronged with Parisians, their faces shining with relief and joy as their purgatory comes to an end. Then the giant bell of Notre Dame Cathedral rings out across the city, proclaiming a new dawn of liberty.

[47] *Michael McDowell* [https://www.michaelmcdowell.ie/nphet.html], 7 Nov. 2020. *thejournal.ie* [https://www.thejournal.ie/peadar-toibin-arsed-5220495-Oct2020/], 7 Nov. 2020.

PEACA NA SINSEAR ("ORIGINAL SIN")

First published: 14 November 2020

I grew up during the 1950s and 1960s in Ireland - an almost totally Catholic country. Like everything else we learnt in those days, from multiplication tables to poetry, we imbibed the fundamentals of religion through rote-learning. Every schoolboy had a Green Catechism containing the basics of Catholic dogma. No one expected us to understand the complex theological doctrines (like the Trinity) presented in its pages. We just had to memorise it all.

The Catechism contained 443 questions and answers divided into three sections: 1) The Apostles' Creed, 2) The Commandments of God and of the Church, and 3) Prayer and the Sacraments. The book's genius lay in its distillation of often arcane concepts into a few lines that, if repeated often enough, could be committed to a child's long term memory.

If the idea of rote-learning turns many people off today, so too does a lot of what the Catechism contained - especially the idea of Original Sin. The term was introduced in question 57, one of a series dealing with "Our First Parents" - Adam and Eve. According to the Catechism, Original Sin was a state of imperfection passed on to every generation of humans since Adam and Eve. This state of imperfection was a legacy of their decision to yield to devilish temptation, rather than obey God.

It's easy to dismiss the Adam and Eve story as childish fantasy. But not so easy to reject the principle embedded in the story - that human beings are inherently imperfect. Here is what my Catechism had to say about that:

> Because of Adam's sin, we are born without sanctifying grace, our intellect is darkened, our will is weakened, our passions incline us to evil, and we are subject to suffering and death.[48]

Sanctifying grace is a matter of faith. But the other consequences: darkened intellect, weak will, evil passions, and suffering and death? Surely even an atheist would agree that these are part and parcel of the human condition. Examples abound. For instance, what about the witch-hunts of the 16th and 17th centuries, surely one of the blackest periods in human history?

Religious authorities at the time decreed that witchcraft posed a fundamental threat to Christianity. Those authorities could be Roman Catholic or Protestant. John Calvin was just as vehement in his denunciation of witches as the pope in Rome.[49] But church leaders needed the secular powers to root out the evil they saw all around them. And there were lots of kings and princes only too willing to follow direction from learned clerics.

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[48] *A Catechism of Catholic doctrine* (Dublin, 1951), p. 21.

[49] Stuart Clark, *Thinking with demons: the idea of witchcraft in early modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997), p. 461.

Across Europe and the Americas, laws were enacted and courts empowered to find, prosecute, and punish anyone who endangered public safety through the practice of witchcraft. Up to 60,000 convicted witches, mainly women, were executed in Europe.[50]

None of this could have happened without the support of ordinary people. Some were reduced to a state of terror by the pronouncements of experts like Heinrich Krämer and Jacob Sprenger, two Dominican inquisitors, whose book, *Malleus Maleficarum* ("The Hammer of the Witches"), was a best-seller in the 16th century.[51] Fear was instilled in the illiterate by graphic images of witches astride their broomsticks or being burnt at the stake. Thanks to the proliferation of printing presses, these images were easily copied and circulated.[52]

Neighbour denounced neighbour - quite often before the accuser could be fingered as a witch him or herself. Eventually public hysteria faded away as religious and legal authorities began to question older beliefs about witches. Nowadays we wonder how any civilised people could inflict such misery and damage on themselves because of unfounded superstition. We draw comfort from the conviction that science and reason now form the bedrock of modern society.

During the 1960s, I imagined that the world was getting better – an illusion I have discussed previously.[53] Perhaps if that sense of progress had continued indefinitely, I might have been persuaded that human perfectibility was possible. But in so many ways - cultural, religious, economic, etc., etc. - the Sixties dream turned out to be nothing more than a chimera. But it's not just the Sixties. Examples from earlier times demonstrate humankind's repeated propensity for short-sightedness and stupidity.

As hysteria engulfs the world in 2020, the teachings drummed into me more than half-a-century ago take on a new relevance. Is the extraordinarily harsh and disproportionate global response to Covid-19 the latest manifestation of our imperfection?

And if that imperfection is not amenable to any human cure, shouldn't we take a fresh look at Original Sin?

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[50] Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Early Modern Europe, 1450-1789* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 386.
[51] Leo Ruickbie, *Witchcraft out of the shadows: a complete history* (London, 2004), pp. 71-2
[52] Charles Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft* (Oxford, 2007), p. 179.
[53] Na seascaidí fada ("The long sixties") on page 36.

AN AOIS TUISCEANA ("THE AGE OF REASON")

First published: 21 November 2020

One of the biggest events of my young life, but I can recall hardly any of it. It must have been the late spring of 1960. I had just turned seven, an important milestone in the eyes of the Catholic Church. That august institution calculated that I could now distinguish between right and wrong, that I had in fact arrived at the age of reason or understanding. It was time for me to confess my sins and take the Blessed Eucharist for the first time.

I had already received the first of the seven sacraments when, as a week-old baby, I was baptised in our local church. Sacraments two and three, Penance and Holy Communion, would now follow in rapid succession. I was only seven, so I had no idea what these rituals signified. I just did what I was told and learnt what I had to.

As I said at the top, my mind is largely a blank about this period. I have no memory of those few minutes in a dark confession box as I tried to remember my rehearsed list of sins. Or of dressing up in my first suit and having a white rosette pinned to my lapel for the Holy Communion ceremony. Nothing comes to mind of the inevitable visits to neighbours and relatives afterwards, and being told how grown-up I looked. I must have collected a lot of cash during said visits, but how much and where it went I have no idea.

Only one thing stands out in my memory more than six decades later, and it's something I am not proud of.

My first school was at a nearby convent run by the Sisters of Charity. One of the nuns, a nice lady as I recall, prepared our class for Holy Communion. I have forgotten the detail of her instruction, but one stipulation she made is etched in my mind. She made it plain that, when we received the sacred host on our tongues, it should not touch our teeth. Instead we were to allow the wafer to dissolve slowly in our mouths. This after all was the body of Christ and must not be defiled.

I took this warning very seriously, but not everyone did - not Francis, one of my classmates. Francis was a bit 'slow', a boy of low intelligence. He smiled a lot and generally kept to himself. He was pretty harmless really. As we returned from the altar to our pews I noticed that Francis was chewing something. Clearly he was masticating the blessed bread! Outside the church I found the nun and told her what I had seen. What she did next I can only guess.

A few days later I accompanied my father on his rounds. Each week we walked around our locality to collect the parish dues on behalf of the clergy. One stop along the way was at the home of my fellow communicant. His mother answered the door. I have no memory of what she said or her demeanour as she said it. I do know she was angry at me for telling on Francis. I burned with shame as she delivered her rebuke.

If I had any subsequent conversations about the episode with the nun, or Francis' mother, or indeed Francis himself, they left no impression on me. All I was left with was a nagging doubt. I had obeyed authority by informing the nun about what I had seen. But why did I feel it was wrong to have done so?

Maybe at this time, or a little later, I learnt the Ten Commandments. According to my green Catechism, the eighth read as follows:

> Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.[54]

This was a wise and sensible injunction against undermining someone's reputation by spreading falsehoods about him/her. Of course such a thing is wrong, and not just for Christians. But the eighth commandment wasn't simply a prohibition against lying. It also covered something called 'detraction', which the Catechism defined as "the sin committed by those who, without sufficient reason, make known the hidden faults of others".[55]

So even telling the truth about someone could be wrong - if it damaged their character!

This line of reasoning was far too complex for any seven-year-old to absorb. But at the time I did not need to understand it as I do now. That painful intervention by Francis' mother was enough to set me straight until I could figure it out for myself.

It took time, but as I grew older I lost my eagerness to please worldly authority. Manmade rules and regulations are necessary to maintain a safe social order. But eventually I learnt that, if they infringe on our basic humanity, I should not comply.

Perhaps at last I am reaching the age of reason.

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[54] *Catechism* (1951), p. 64.

[55] Ibid, p. 65.

IN AGHAIDH AN FHIONNAIDH, ("AGAINST THE GRAIN") 1/3

First published: 28 November 2020

Donal Harris lived a few minutes' walk from our estate and was in my class at the local Christian Brothers school. He was a soft-spoken boy, intelligent and shy, and we got on well.

In 1964 we joined the altar boys together. Once we had been trained in the liturgical rubrics and the Latin responses, we were chosen to serve our first Mass. Between bell-ringing and looking after the cruets, there was enough to keep two servers busy, even on a weekday. I remember little of it, but our parents were in the congregation and I'm sure they were proud of the pair of us.

A year or two later things changed. We both liked pop music but Donal's interest became more focused and intense than mine. He took up the drums, grew his hair, and started wearing low-cut trousers called hipsters. One day in class I asked him who had written "Those Were The Days". His answer, Ginger Baker, puzzled me. Shortly afterwards I learnt that Mary Hopkin was not the only pop star to have released a song of that name. A British rock group named Cream, whose drummer was Ginger Baker, had recorded an identically-titled track on their LP, *Wheels of Fire*.

I did not know it at the time but, from the age of 14, Donal was already performing as Don Harris in various clubs around Dublin. Eventually he was expelled from school - or he left, I don't know which - before our final examination, the Leaving Certificate. By then we had grown apart and I lost touch with him after that. Through the music press I learnt of his progress through Dublin's rock scene. None of the groups he joined, like The Urge or Peggy's Leg, stayed together very long, and none achieved much fame beyond the local scene. But maybe it wasn't the lure of fame or fortune that drew Donal into that world.

The south inner city area where Donal and I grew up was a colourless and boring place. But it was paradise compared with our school. I remember the school as a brutal institution where corporal punishment was meted out daily, rarely reluctantly and often with gusto. I coped by being as inconspicuous as possible, sitting at the back of the classroom and counting the minutes until the sound of the bell heralded freedom for another day.

Donal probably felt the same as I did, although I don't recall him ever talking about it. I wonder now if his decision to change tack at the age of 13 or 14 was born out of a desire to escape from our hideous environment. Or was it something deeper? Donal's transformation was so comprehensive and so final that I suspect it would have happened anyway. It was as if he was so dissatisfied with himself that he decided to become a different person entirely.

I think many people feel that impulse to change, to become somebody

else. But few follow through. Donal was a rare exception. He made the transition to his new life with a degree of dedication that is impossible not to admire. He demonstrated by his demeanour and appearance that he was rebelling against the role that had been allotted to him. He managed not only to go against the grain, but to persist long enough to emerge into a totally new life as a rock drummer. According to one source, Donal became a respected session musician, performing with David Bowie in the 1980s.

Historian Arthur Marwick summed up the sixties cultural revolution as having "established the enduring cultural values and social behaviour for the rest of the [20th] century". He went on, "there has been nothing quite like it; nothing would ever be the same again".[56] It doesn't matter whether you believe that revolution to have been a spontaneous outburst of youthful creativity, or a contrived overturning of the old order. The continuing truth of Marwick's conclusion is plain to see by anyone who lived through the decade.

Donal died in Switzerland in the early 1990s. So I don't know what his perspective on that time would be now. However it is safe to say that Marwick's judgement on the sixties revolution could be applied to Donal himself - nothing was ever the same again for him as a result of his life-changing decision. For better or worse he took control of his life and, as far as I know, kept to the new course he set for himself.

IN AGHAIDH AN FHIONNAIDH, ("AGAINST THE GRAIN") 2/3

First published: 12 December 2020

In an earlier post I described how Ireland responded to the pop revolution of the 1960s.[57] Firstly there were the showbands who pumped out the big hits in packed dancehalls around the country. Then came the Clancy Brothers, Johnny McEvoy, and others who tapped into traditional music to produce something a bit more home-grown for the Irish fans.

A third manifestation of local pop culture were the beat groups such as the Creatures and Orange Machine. In terms of style and sound, these were the closest thing we had to the international acts then changing the face of popular music. But the beat groups were the 'Cinderella' of the Irish pop scene. Few managed to dent the national charts, and none emulated the global success of their American or British counterparts.

One of those who nearly made it was the Granny's Intentions group from Limerick. Sometime in the late-60s I watched them perform on Irish television. Lead singer Johnny Duhan adopted the cocky demeanour of Mick Jagger. But he had a stronger and more distinctive voice than the Rolling Stones' front man. To my naïve young eyes and ears this seemed

[56] Marwick, *The Sixties* (Oxford, 1998), p. 806.

[57] Ó Riada an cumhachtach ("Ó Riada the magician") 1/4 on page 10.

like a band destined for the top.

As a youngster Johnny Duhan was captivated by the sounds he listened to on Radio Luxembourg. Like my pal, Donal Harris, he quit school and threw himself into the new world of pop. Before long he and his band were playing at London's Speakeasy Club to an audience that included Jimi Hendrix and Rolling Stone, Brian Jones.

As the decade drew to a close he was sharing a flat in Dublin with two wannabe pop stars, Phil Lynott and Gary Moore. Granny's Intentions were at the peak of their short-lived fame, having recently had a top ten hit in Ireland with "Never an Everyday Thing". So although all three flatmates were about the same age, Johnny alone had so far achieved celebrity status.

While still in his early teens Johnny Duhan rebelled against the conventions of ordinary life to answer the call of the cultural revolution. But he found that his new 'anything goes' lifestyle came with its own expectations and obligations. The record company wanted Granny's Intentions to record the kind of music that would sell in large quantities. But even his bandmates thought that Johnny's new songs were not "rock'n'roll".[58] Meanwhile they were enjoying the fruits of their initial success, which included ingesting LSD and other illegal drugs, and they resented their lead singer for not joining in.

For the second time in his young life Johnny Duhan had arrived at a cross-road. He was not ready to admit defeat and return to the old world of academic qualifications and a pensionable job. Yet he was not happy either with the route his music career was taking. He had left school early and felt he still had many things to learn. So he devoured obscure books on philosophy, science, and literature. His colleagues noticed the gulf growing between him and them. In a telling passage in his acclaimed memoir, *There Is A Time*, Johnny recounts how one of his bandmates accused him of being "different".[59]

He accepted the charge and decided to embark on a new course in which he could continue to make music – but strictly on his terms. So he left the world of commercial pop and became a solo troubadour, performing his own heartfelt songs to appreciative if sometimes small audiences of devotees. Although he enjoyed the occasional hit, like "The Voyage", Johnny Duhan's change of direction did not lead him to the heady heights reached by his former flatmates and a handful of other Irish luminaries. That did not seem to matter though. Other things were more precious, as he wrote in the lyric of another song,

I risked my soul to be a winner.[60]

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[58] Johnny Duhan, *There is a Time* (Dingle, 2001), p. 181.
[59] Ibid, p. 177.
[60] Johnny Duhan, *To the Light: Unsung* (Barna, 2009), p. 167 ("On The Water").

Just in time, Johnny Duhan discovered the price of fame and fortune.

IN AGHAIDH AN FHIONNAIDH, ("AGAINST THE GRAIN") 3/3

First published: 19 December 2020

Following the shocking news of Robert Kennedy's assassination, I was keen to learn more about what was going on in the world. In Ireland in the late-1960s, this meant tuning in to Raidió Teilifís Éireann's (RTE) current affairs programme, *7 Days*.

The programme's main presenters were Brian Farrell, John O'Donoghue, and Brian Cleeve. Farrell was a noted academic and political scientist, O'Donoghue already an experienced current affairs anchor, and Cleeve had distinguished himself as a commentator on Irish life in his *Discovery* series.

Brian Cleeve stood out for his English accent and aristocratic appearance. In 1966 his accent got him into trouble with RTE when some colleagues decided that it was inappropriate for someone with such a background to be so prominent on national television just as the country was about to mark the jubilee of the 1916 Rising.[61] Brian was briefly suspended but public opinion caused the station to reinstate him. Now he was back in a top slot investigating the big news stories of the day.

His first producer on *7 Days*, Lelia Doolan, described the contrast between the sometimes frantic atmosphere on set leading up to airtime and what she called Brian Cleeve's "awful relaxed casualness" when he introduced the programme.[62] Brian must have been subject to the same pressures as everyone around him. But his urbane manner concealed any nervous tension he was feeling when he hosted a live broadcast.

Many years later I met Brian Cleeve and learnt more about his fascinating life - before and after his career in television. I discovered a man with his own individual perspective, and someone prepared to go 'against the grain' if he had to.

This trait meant that he often clashed with overbearing authority, whether in school, the British army, or during his time in Apartheid-era South Africa. When, after several run-ins at RTE, his contract was terminated, he went straight to the top and complained directly (and unsuccessfully) to the Director-General.

Yet, as his TV persona indicated, Brian was not naturally aggressive or confrontational. Once when competing in a fencing championship he lost the bout when he held back after inadvertently drawing blood from his opponent.

Brian may have lacked the 'killer instinct', but he did not lack courage.

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[61] *Discovery* on page 100.

[62] Lelia Doolan, Jack Dowling, Bob Quinn, *Sit Down and Be Counted: The Cultural Evolution of a Television Station* (Dublin, 1969), p. 86.

At the same time he was not naturally fearless, quite the contrary. Like Seán Ó Riada, he was more keenly aware than most people of the spiritual realm surrounding us. The perceptible presence of shadowy, threatening forces could be quite frightening. But Brian overcame his fears by convincing himself that it was 'undignified' to allow them to dominate his thinking. And so he banished them completely from his mind.

When I got to know Brian he had already faced the latest test of his mettle. In 1977 he underwent a profound spiritual experience that changed his life forever. He set out the fruits of this experience in several books published in the early-1980s. They told of the sort of relationship between God and human that was possible for anyone who wanted it. What Brian wrote made the Catholic teaching of my youth easier to understand and left me feeling reinvigorated and eager to learn more.

For Brian himself, finding God meant losing other things, like his career as a successful novelist and his status as an elder statesman of Irish broadcasting. None of this mattered to someone long used to being ostracised for his convictions. What was different about this turn in Brian's life was the impact it had on total strangers, like me.

I learnt a lot from the many spiritual insights Brian Cleeve wrote about. But I learnt more from knowing the man himself, a man who never allowed the pressures or temptations of life to knock him off course.

ÁILLEACHT ("BEAUTY")

First published: 05 December 2020

As regular readers will know, for much of the 1960s I was fascinated by pop music and religion. The fact that I was largely oblivious to other aspects of Irish society and culture simply reflects my immaturity at the time. But, as I now realise, it was not just my twin preoccupations that were being transformed or even destroyed. I was living through a revolution that threatened to alter everything, including Dublin's architectural landscape.

When I was growing up the look of Dublin reflected the city's history, which dated back to the Middle Ages. There were medieval buildings like St. Audoen's Protestant church and Dublin Castle, both located only a mile from where we lived. Just across the Liffey was the Royal Hospital in Kilmainham, built in the 17th-century but largely gone to seed - so off-limits to me.

Of course there were also new glass and steel structures rising up in the city centre, such as the horrible Hawkins House near College Green. This replaced the Regal Cinema where I had spent several happy Sunday afternoons with my father. The Regal was by no means ancient - it was built in the 1930s. But its demise reflected a growing move to bulldoze anything that stood in the way of progress.[63]

As the Irish economy took off in the early 1960s, an alliance of property developers and politicians set about dismantling Dublin's architectural heritage. The city's elegant Georgian streetscapes and squares – built during the eighteenth century under British rule - were a particular target of those who, for reasons of profit or misplaced nationalism, sought to replace them with modern office blocks.

Probably the best-known example of this trend was the violation of the famous 'Georgian Mile' stretching from Leeson Street down to Holles Street Hospital. In September 1964, the government ordered the demolition of sixteen of the houses along this unique vista and their replacement with a new headquarters for the Electricity Supply Board (ESB).

Author Brian Cleeve compared this outrage to ripping several perfectly good teeth out of someone's mouth. The results were just as hideous as that image suggests because, as Brian wrote,

> Georgian architecture depended for its effects on wholeness, on a panoramic sweep of view along a terrace or around a crescent or square.[64]

Some of Dublin's Georgian districts consisted of dilapidated slums, while others were made up of professional offices and stylish homes. But, irrespective of their current state, there was something ineffably beautiful about a long terrace of Georgian houses, a beauty that could not be found

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[63] Frank McDonald, *The Destruction of Dublin* (Dublin 1985), pp. 40-1.

[64] Brian Cleeve, *A View of the Irish* (London 1983), p. 162.

in a modern eyesore like the ESB HQ.

But what is beauty? Does it depend on the subjective 'eye of the beholder'? Or has beauty an absolute reality, independent of the observer? In the closing lines of his "Ode on a Grecian Urn", John Keats made a bold assertion.

> 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty', – That is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

If truth is absolute then so too is beauty. That is how I interpret Keats' famous lines. But in the 1960s these concepts were already becoming unfashionable in a society that had little regard for what Myles na Gopaleen called "the nation's soul".[65]

Thankfully Georgian Dublin survived demolition and many of those terraces and squares continue to delight the eye today; a sign perhaps that, as long as we prize the beauty around us, those seeking its destruction will not prevail.

[65] *Irish Georgian Society* [https://www.igs.ie/about/history], 5 Dec 2020.

SPIORAD NA NOLLAG ("THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS")

First published: 26 December 2020

I must have been quite small when I was brought to Pim's department store in South Great George's Street. It was coming up to Christmas and Santa Claus was due to arrive for his month-long stint at the grotto.

There were other big stores in town, like Clery's and Brown Thomas, but I was taken to Pim's on the promise that something special would happen. And so it turned out. As we waited with the crowd on the pavement outside, a helicopter landed on the flat roof and Santa emerged, waving down to us five storeys below.

Pretty spectacular alright, but not quite the show I was hoping for. For some reason I imagined that when Santa disembarked from the chopper, he would parachute off the rooftop, floating gracefully down to the ground where we stood. Now that would have been special!

Another memory of Christmas was our visit to the Moving Crib in Parnell Square. Every Catholic church in Ireland had its own crib featuring the traditional nativity scene of Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus surrounded by several shepherds and assorted farm animals. What distinguished the Moving Crib was that several of the figures were not simply plaster statues, but mechanically-operated figures that, well, moved.

Again, this famous attraction promised more than it delivered to an imaginative youngster like me. Firstly, the main characters in the tableau, the holy family, were static. True, the supporting players, such as the cow and the donkey, nodded their heads repeatedly but I don't recall them doing much else.

Somehow, these two memories sum up the failed promise of Christmas, whether viewed from a secular or a religious perspective. Christmas never quite lived up to my (admittedly lofty) expectations. Maybe this has to do with the uncertainty surrounding the feast. Is it meant to be a religious festival marking the birth of our Saviour? Or is it really a wholly secular knees up designed to lighten the gloom of winter?

Perhaps because we can't decide which, our society has created a patchwork quilt of traditions and practices that reflect both sides of our nature, the sacred and the profane. So we have ended up with a mixture of mistletoe and Magi, turkey and Advent calendars, carol-singing and Christmas trees. The result is an oddly unsatisfying compromise that neither elevates us to the heights of religious enlightenment, nor leads us into the wild abandon of bacchanalian excess.

We have been told that Christianity adapted its beliefs to the prevailing customs of its potential converts. So although Jesus was probably born in the spring, his birthday was transferred to the end of December. This allowed the Church to absorb the pagan festivals of Yule and Sol Invictus into a new Christian feast consistent, more or less, with its teach-

ings.

What emerged was Christmas, or in the Old English, *Cristes maesse* ("the Mass of Christ"). As the etymology indicates, the centrepiece of the new religious blend was the Mass.

As I discussed in an earlier post, the Catholic Church dropped its ancient liturgy in order to propitiate religious reformers.[66] Fortunately I caught a glimpse of the sublime ritual that many generations of Catholics experienced, before the Mass was replaced by a pedestrian service firmly rooted in the here and now.

Was it the extinction of the Mass that made the contradictions inherent in the modern Christmas more apparent? Could everything be different?

With all sorts of possibilities opening up now in our strange new world, maybe we can make a fresh start and find the true spirit of Christmas. A spirit that lights up our little corner of the world – especially at this dark time of year.

[66] Tosaíonn an réabhlóid, ("The revolution begins") 1/3 on page 31.

CEIST AN SPÓIRT ("A QUESTION OF SPORT")

First published: 03 January 2021

Once a year the Christian Brothers dragged us onto a cold and windy field to play a bit of hurling. I was not sure why we had to endure this ordeal, and I did not really care. Today I suspect the Brothers were trying to counteract the prevailing devotion to English football shared by my classmates, and maybe also they hoped that one or two of us would display some ability in the national game.

I could put up with this for a couple of hours safe in the knowledge that I would not be picked for any further torment on the playing pitch. I was not a sporty kid, by either inclination or aptitude. So, although I was not remotely attracted to the native sports which were the preoccupation of my school teachers, I paid little attention either to 'foreign' games like soccer or rugby.

I do recall one exception to my indifference to football though. During the long summer break of 1966 I diligently recorded the results of all 32 matches played in the qualifying rounds of the World Cup. Somehow I had acquired a booklet specially designed for fans of the tournament, with lots of blank spaces to write in the details. I watched all the games, including the final between England and West Germany. But I lost interest after that and the booklet has long since disappeared.

If I could not work up much enthusiasm for team sports, I was more ambivalent when it came to individual competition - boxing for instance. Not that I wanted to see two men trying to batter each other into submission, even under Marquess of Queensberry Rules. But during the 1960s one man singlehandedly elevated boxing above its primitive roots into something almost noble. This was Muhammad Ali, or Cassius Clay as he was known before changing his name in 1964.

Ali's clever quips and nimbleness in the ring made his opponents look dull. Through a combination of innate charm, self-confidence, and high intelligence, he transcended the boundaries of his chosen sport to become a global celebrity. Like the Beatles, Ali brought fun and colour into an otherwise drab world.

Almost a year after the World Cup ended, Muhammad Ali was stripped of his Heavyweight Champion title and prevented from boxing professionally for more than three years. The fact that Ali was ousted because of his principled refusal to fight in Vietnam went right over my head at the time.[67] But his departure from the ring ended any attachment I felt towards boxing.

During the World Cup it was the creation of lists or datasets that engaged my attention. The names and numbers I so painstakingly wrote

[67] Thomas Hauser, *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times* (London, 2005), pp. 198-9.

down could have come from the pop charts or the railway timetable. The fact that they were based on an international football competition was incidental. If I were a youngster nowadays I might spend my time on something equally pointless, such as logging details of the government's daily pandemic bulletins for example.

However, my interest in boxing ran a bit deeper. I would prefer if Muhammad Ali had achieved his success in a less brutal endeavour. His skill and grace would have brought honour to whatever branch of athletics he chose to pursue. But if he had been a champion sprinter, for instance, I doubt if even Muhammad Ali could have overcome my indifference to sport in general.

No, Ali's appeal for me rested on his artless way of suggesting that no one need be bound by the limits of society in pursuing their true potential, on or off the sporting field.

FÍRINNE AGUS BRÉAGA ("TRUTH AND LIES") 1/2

First published: 10 January 2021

I must have been pretty young at the time, maybe ten or eleven. I did not have much self-confidence so I was secretly pleased one day when two local kids asked for my help. Apparently they had been playing in a derelict building near our council estate when something happened to a third friend and he was now trapped. Would I hurry there to rescue him?

So off I ran on my important mission. But when I reached the building I realised it was empty. And then I got it. I had been duped!

Why do I remember such a trivial incident nearly six decades later? Is it because, like the Communion Day memory recounted in an earlier article, an important life lesson is hidden just below the surface?[68] This time the lesson was about how easily duped each of us can be.

I grew up with an inherent sense of trust in the word of authority, whether that was government, religion, or news media. I was not a believer in what is known today in popular parlance as 'conspiracy theories'.

Then as a young adult I read several books on how advertising can be used to persuade people to buy products and services. Later I worked in a related field. I realised then as now that there is nothing wrong with a message that alerts consumers to the availability of something they might want or need. But that is not what most advertising actually does. Instead it uses sleight of hand and psychological trickery to create a desire in people that was not previously present. A really successful ad will achieve this without the subject being aware that he or she is being swayed in a certain direction.

One of my former colleagues used to regale us with a story of a research subject who insisted that he was not influenced by advertising. No, he was convinced that he drank Guinness because it was "good for you", apparently not realising that he was quoting the drinks company's slogan almost verbatim. Money well spent by Guinness' marketing department I'd say!

While this is all relatively harmless – after all we live in a consumer society whose existence depends on us buying stuff from each other – there is a much more insidious side to advertising. This is when these techniques are used to persuade people that fiction is actually truth. It is a murky area because if a campaign to deceive the public is effective, we may never know the truth. Occasionally, however, the veil is lifted.

An example is the story of atrocities alleged to have been perpetrated by Iraqi soldiers in Kuwait in 1990. This untrue story was concocted by a public relations firm, Hill and Knowlton, as part of a campaign to persuade the American public that the US should go to war against Iraq in response

[68] An aois tuisceana ("The age of reason") on page 44.

to the latter's invasion of Kuwait.[69]

This was not simply a case of a rogue company engaging in deception. Then-US president, George H. W. Bush, reiterated the story numerous times as if it were true. It was later revealed that a former colleague of Bush, Craig Fuller, was president of Hill and Knowlton at the time.[70]

Not a 'smoking gun' perhaps, but this case raises an important question. What lies have been, or are being, propagated by the authorities, up to and including government?

In July 2020, former Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, revealed that his government inflated Covid-19 fatality figures in Ireland by counting "all deaths, in all settings, suspected cases even when no lab test was done, and included people with underlying terminal illnesses who died with Covid but not of it".[71]

Varadkar was responding to a report issued by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA). HIQA found that, while there were about 1,200 extra deaths in April, the number for the following month or so was lower than average. The report speculated that "Covid-19 may have accelerated the time of death of frail and vulnerable people over the peak period".[72]

Up to 11 December 2020 the total death toll from Covid-19 was 1,862. The vast majority of these, 1,739 (93%) suffered from an underlying condition such as chronic heart disease. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the median age of those with at least one such underlying condition was 83.[73]

It will be several more months before official statistics on overall deaths for Ireland in 2020 are available. Then it should be possible to determine not only the level of excess deaths over previous years' data, but also the causes of those deaths. But, given what we know now, the prospect that the public are being deceived about Covid-19 is worryingly plausible.

As a young child it did not take me long to figure out that I had been fooled by those two pranksters. The evidence of my own eyes was enough. Today the stakes are much higher, but the evidence of deception is there for those who wish to see it.

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[69] James E. Grunig, "Public Relations and International Affairs: Effects, Ethics and Responsibility." *Journal of International Affairs* 47, no. 1 (1993), pp. 137-62.
[70] Peter Wintonick, *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media* (Montreal, 1994), p. 78.
[71] Varadkar, Leo (2020), Interesting but not a surprise. *Twitter*. 3 Jul. 2020. https://twitter.com/LeoVaradkar/status/1278995351169613824, 10 Jan 2021.
[72] *Irish Times*, 3 Jul 2020.
[73] *Central Statistics Office*. https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/br/b-cdc/covid-19deathsandcasesseries18/. 10 Jan 2021.

FÍRINNE AGUS BRÉAGA, ("TRUTH AND LIES") 2/2

First published: 16 January 2021

I began reading when I was about five. What we used to call 'comic cuts', like *The Dandy* and *The Beano*, were my starting point. I can't recall when I graduated to more demanding fare, like the children's stories of the 19th-century Danish author, Hans Christian Andersen. I probably came across Andersen for the first time in a revival of the Danny Kaye movie, to which I would have been brought in the 1960s.

If I was not already familiar with stories like "The Ugly Duckling" and "The Emperor's New Clothes", the catchy songs sung by Danny Kaye in the film were a good introduction to the basic narratives. When I actually read the stories, or had them read to me, I cannot say.

Now, in these febrile times, "The Emperor's New Clothes" has assumed a new relevance and this has led me to examine it afresh.

Andersen's account of a monarch duped by two conmen into buying an 'invisible suit' was not original. The Danish author based it on a medieval tale from Moorish Spain. But he made two crucial changes that brought out the essence of the story more clearly than the source material. The result is a moral fable that is universal in its appeal.

In the original tale, it is the offspring of unmarried parents who are unable to see the cloth. But, in the revised version, the fabric is invisible to the stupid and those unfit for office. As the lie about the cloth spreads throughout the court, the fraudsters develop their scam secure in the belief that no one - including the emperor – would be willing to lose face by admitting he can see nothing. And so it transpires.

The author also changed the climax of the story so that, as the emperor proceeds solemnly through the streets to show off his new garb to the people, it is a child who utters the words: "But he has nothing on!" The medieval version gave this revelation to an adult.

Andersen's alterations were inspired. As one commentator put it:

> Most of us have, in all likelihood, at some time pretended to know what we do not know or to be what we are not in order to save our face, to avoid the censure or ridicule of others.[74]

By making it a child who shouts out what everyone else is afraid to admit, Andersen was arguing that the fear of being mocked or sneered at is not innate in the human psyche – we learn it as we grow older. But an innocent child can blurt out the truth because his/her "mental honesty has not yet been spoiled by the pressure of convention".[75]

And then there is the final twist. Despite the child's cry being echoed by the crowd, the emperor decides to carry on with his big parade rather

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[74] Charles Madison Curry & Erle Elsworth Clippinger (eds.), *Children's literature: a textbook of sources for teachers and teacher-training classes* (New York, 1921), pp 180-83.
[75] Ibid.

than retreat to his palace in embarrassment, because

> he realized that it would never do to stop the procession. So he held himself stiffer than ever, and the chamberlains carried the invisible train.[76]

Andersen's ending is ambiguous, leaving a crucial question unanswered. When something like this happens do people experience a permanent awakening to the truth? Or can they be quickly returned to the world of self-delusion from which they have been only temporarily roused?

If we accept that the lessons of "The Emperor's New Clothes" are not limited to either the time or the place in which the story was written, maybe we can find the answer to this riddle in another, more recent, work of fiction.

The BBC drama series, *Roadkill*, chronicles the twists and turns in the life of an unscrupulous government minister. He seems impervious to the personal and professional hazards that threaten to stop his gallop. In a brief exchange with his aide the protagonist, played by Hugh Laurie, delivers this insight into his personal philosophy:

> You can get away with anything if you just brazen it out.[77]

Cynical maybe. but does it answer our question? More to the point does it also explain why so many people continue to acquiesce in a deception about the pandemic, a falsehood brazenly maintained by unscrupulous politicians?

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[76] Ibid.

[77] Masterpiece PBS, 26 Oct 2020, 'Roadkill: Preview', *YouTube* [https://youtu.be/FAuyPgRM4ng], 12 Jan 2021.

BUNÚIS NA RÉABHLÓIDE, ("ORIGINS OF THE REVOLUTION") 1/5

First published: 23 January 2021

In my first post almost exactly a year ago I referred to the 1960s "cultural revolution" that transformed our world beyond recognition. Just like another revolution in France nearly two centuries earlier.

As I explored my own memories and dug into the copious documentary sources on the 1960s, I questioned whether the societal upheaval through which I lived could have been the result of random chance or happenstance. Were the people and events that made up the cultural revolution really unconnected? Or was there a pattern to it all?

Of course, coincidence is sometimes the most likely explanation for a series of unusual developments. But sometimes it is not; the only way to find out which is to research it. This is what I have tried to do in previous posts.[78] My investigations so far suggest that the radical changes in religion and music I have discussed were neither spontaneous nor unrelated to each other.

Now with our world transformed again by the bizarre public response to Covid-19, the idea that officialdom can deliberately set out to deceive has become much more plausible. What we have witnessed since March 2020 is a sustained and co-ordinated propaganda exercise to persuade us that a lethal virus is tearing through our communities and that only the strictest measures can save us.

In a previous post I have demonstrated why this claim is unlikely to be true.[79] For anyone with an open mind, there is plenty of other evidence available that undermines the official narrative.

But if much of what we read in our newspapers and see on our televisions these days is a lie, who is behind it and why are they doing it?

The answer to these questions is, I believe, to be found in a clear-sighted review of history. In the case of this blog, that history is focused on the 1960s. By delving into the origins of the cultural revolution of more than a half-century ago, I hope to find answers to these important questions.

BUNÚIS NA RÉABHLÓIDE, ("ORIGINS OF THE REVOLUTION") 2/5

First published: 30 January 2021

During the 1960s illegal drugs did not feature in my life at all. If I heard of LSD back then, it was only as the shorthand for the currency of the time (£sd). But the newer meaning of LSD was Lysergic acid diethylamide, an hallucinogenic or psychedelic drug that:

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[78] e.g. Tosaíonn an réabhlóid ("The revolution begins") 3/3 on page 34.

[79] Fírinne agus bréaga ("Truth and lies") 1/2 on page 57.

> acts by temporarily dismissing the sentries guarding the gates of consciousness. The unprotected brain is invaded by a mob of unprocessed stimuli on which it is unable to impose logic.[80]

For upcoming and wannabe pop stars, taking LSD was a rite of passage into an elite inner circle that was going to change the world - for the better of course. The Beatles promoted the drug via their *Sgt Pepper's* album and the message filtered down to Irish bands like Granny's Intentions.

LSD was championed also by an assortment of 'anti-establishment' influencers such as beat poet Allen Ginsberg, novelist Ken Kesey, and rock group The Grateful Dead. But the best-known advocate of the drug, then and now, was Dr Timothy Leary (1920-1996).

Of Irish extraction, Leary was born and raised in Springfield, Massachusetts. In 1959 he went to work as a lecturer in clinical psychology at Harvard University. While there he learnt all about psychedelic drugs and so began his swift transformation from college professor into what a newspaper referred to as "the messiah of the psychedelic movement".[81]

Leary's life during the 1960s was pretty colourful. By 1963 he had been fired by the university for his unorthodox drug sessions with students. A few years later he was leading a religious cult he called the League for Spiritual Discovery, the main ritual of which was the ingestion of LSD. In 1970 Leary was consorting with revolutionary groups like the Black Panthers and the Weathermen.[82]

But was Timothy Leary all he seemed to be? Because it wasn't just hippies and radicals who supported his cause. For instance, Leary came up with his slogan, "Turn on, tune in, drop out", after a pep talk from the media and marketing guru Marshall McLuhan during a lunch in a New York hotel.[83]

In 1963, when Leary was fired by Harvard University, he soon found a refuge for his LSD-based experimentation at Millbrook House. This ornate mansion is situated on a 2,300-acre estate not far from New York city. Its owners were three members of the Hitchcock family, who happened to be heirs to a vast fortune founded on banking and oil in the 19th century by Thomas Mellon. Today BNY Mellon is one of the world's largest banks with total assets of US$381.5bn.[84]

But perhaps the most sinister aspect of Leary's preoccupation with LSD is that his supplies of the drug came from the US Central Intelligence

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[80] Gerard de Groot, *The Sixties Unplugged: A kaleidoscopic history of a disorderly decade* (Basingstoke, 2008), p. 208.
[81] *Irish Independent*, 17 Jan. 1970.
[82] Ibid, 12 Nov. 1970.
[83] Robert Greenfield, *Timothy Leary: A biography* (Orlando, FL., 2006), pp. 282-3.
[84] *S&P Global Market Intelligence*, "The World's 100 Largest Banks 2020" [https://www.spglobal.com/marketintelligence/en/news-insights/latest-news-headlines/the-world-s-100-largest-banks-2020-57854079], 30 Jan. 2021.

Agency (CIA).[85] The CIA's role in promoting LSD as part of the MK-ULTRA mind control program is now well known, as is the involvement of various scientists and academics in that program.[86] Although the full nature of Leary's connection to the CIA is unclear, his links with the Langley spooks went back to the early-1950s.[87] One of his more notable LSD-related contacts is said to have been Mary Pinchot, wife of a CIA agent and mistress to President John F. Kennedy.[88]

In Ireland and elsewhere cannabis, barbiturates, and amphetamines, were the more common 'recreational' drugs during the 1960s. However, although not as widely used as these, the influence of LSD on the development and progress of the cultural revolution was immense. As a commentator writes:

> The movers and shakers of the art, fashion and music worlds were dabbling to one degree or another with LSD and so it's a reasonable assumption that LSD use was indirectly informing hip culture, art and fashion at that time.[89]

That LSD's role in the 1960s cultural revolution may have been part of a gigantic social experiment run by the CIA was discussed by leading radicals at the time.[90] Not long before he was murdered in 1980, ex-Beatle John Lennon revealed to *Playboy* magazine that he was still a fan of the drug, and then continued:

> We must always remember to thank the CIA and the Army for LSD…They invented LSD to control people and what they did was give us freedom.[91]

While Lennon's credibility as a source may be questioned, it would be foolish to dismiss the words of the man who in 1966 sang "Turn off your mind, relax and float downstream" on the Beatles' *Revolver* album.

Timothy Leary may not have lived to see his dream of "legions of stoned youth marching ever onward to the Promised Land".[92] But his ascension to the top of the counter-cultural pyramid was made a lot easier by a combination of marketing expertise, elite patronage, and government support.

Leary was one of a number of well-placed actors involved in a cultural 'earthquake' whose aftershocks reverberate to this day.

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[85] Mark H. Lytle, *America's Uncivil Wars: The Sixties Era from Elvis to the Fall of Richard Nixon* (Oxford, 2006), p. 196
[86] *New York Times*, 4 Aug. 1977, 10 Mar 1999.
[87] Martin A. Lee & Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD: the CIA, the Sixties, and Beyond* (New York, 1985), p. 73.
[88] Greenfield, *Timothy Leary*, p. 186.
[89] Andy Roberts, *Albion Dreaming: A popular history of LSD in Britain* (Singapore, 2012)
[90] Lee & Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, p. 218.
[91] *namedat*, David Sheff, "1980 Playboy Interview With John Lennon And Yoko Ono" [https://www.namedat.com/1980-playboy-interview-with-john-lennon-and-yoko-ono/], 29 Jan. 2021.
[92] Lee & Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, p. 89.

BUNÚIS NA RÉABHLÓIDE, ("ORIGINS OF THE REVOLUTION") 3/5

First published: 06 February 2021

The Sixties didn't just swing on the dance floor. This was also the decade of sexual liberation. English poet, Philip Larkin, commemorated its advent in a famous verse he composed in 1967.

> Sexual intercourse began
> In nineteen sixty-three
> (which was rather late for me) -
> Between the end of the Chatterley ban
> And the Beatles' first LP.[93]

Irish politician, Oliver J. Flanagan, agreed about the timing (kind of), but framed his reflections in more prosaic language. In March 1971, during a heated debate on *The Late Late Show*, Flanagan claimed that "there was no sex in Ireland before television".[94]

Of course neither man was being literal. It wasn't that people didn't engage in sexual activity prior to 1960. In their different ways what Larkin and Flanagan were highlighting was a significant shift in public attitudes towards sex, which they subsequently associated with the early years of the decade.

Yes, the Chatterley case, pop music, and television, probably helped fuel the relaxing of societal views of sex. But there were other factors, like new and better treatments for syphilis, the Kinsey reports on sexual behaviour, and growing secularism in the western world. Yet, while all these were important, one development more than any other made the Sixties the era of 'free love'. According to novelist Fay Weldon:

> It was the beginning of the separating out of babies from sex… The pill made an enormous difference to women quite quickly.[95]

Thanks to the contraceptive pill, sex was no longer about procreation - it could be enjoyed in its own right by anyone, married or single. At least this was the dream of its progenitor, birth-control activist Margaret Sanger (1879-1966). In the early-1950s Sanger had a fateful encounter with a biologist named Gregory Pincus (1903-1967). What was the topic of their conversation?

> nothing less than a revolution. No guns or bombs would be involved - only sex, the more the better. Sex without marriage. Sex without children. Sex redesigned, re-engineered, made safe, made limitless, for the pleasure of women.[96]

One clearly excitable critic described the outcome of the Sanger/Pincus

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[93] "Annus mirabilis", in Philip Larkin, *High Windows* (London, 1974). In Nov. 1960 a challenge to the publication of D.H. Lawrence's novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, was defeated at London's Old Bailey. The Beatles' debut album, *Please Please Me*, was released in Mar 1963.

[94] Tobin, *Best of decades*, p. 66. Telefís Éireann, Ireland's first indigenous television station, was launched on 31 Dec. 1961.

[95] *Guardian*, 27 Apr 2013.

[96] Jonathan Eig, *The Birth of the Pill: How Four Pioneers Reinvented Sex and Launched a Revolution* (New York, 2014), p. 6.

alliance as "the most important development in history since the exile of Adam and Eve".[97] In the USA, Britain, and a few other countries, an oral contraceptive to prevent pregnancy was made available to the public in 1961.

While some women welcomed the freedom the pill gave them, others saw it differently. By putting women at the mercy of a medical/pharmaceutical system run mainly by men, the pill was deplored in radical feminist circles as a buttress to patriarchal control, and criticised for the many possible side effects that could endanger the health and well-being of its users.[98]

But pill or no pill, some fundamentals did not change. Commitment-free sex remained high on men's agenda, but women still just wanted love. Now, however, it was more difficult for a woman to resist male sexual desire by invoking the prospect of pregnancy for her and fatherhood for the man. One result was the debasement of the sexual act. As Gerard de Groot observed:

> The generation that convinced itself that "all you need is love" somehow managed to trivialize love's most transcendent expression.[99]

De Groot illustrated his point by describing an incident that occurred in 1969 during a 'hippie happening' in New York's Central Park. A young girl dancing in the rain was set upon and raped by a dozen young men while hundreds looked on.

> As she staggered around dazed and muddy, all she wore was a four-letter word painted on her forehead: 'Love'.[100]

Yet most of those involved viewed what happened, not as a heinous assault, but as "a harmless example of sexual exuberance".[101]

The oral contraceptive pill remained illegal in Ireland until 1980. So while Irish women remained 'safe' from the mixed blessings of the sexual revolution, they continued to contend with other, more traditional, forms of repression.

BUNÚIS NA RÉABHLÓIDE, ("ORIGINS OF THE REVOLUTION") 4/5

First published: 20 February 2021

For anyone older than me by at least a decade, the 1960s must have been a confusing time. Revolution was in the air and old certainties were under fire. But who was leading the revolution?

While it was the young who were being targeted with the "Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll" message encapsulated in Ian Dury's 1977 song, those

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[97] Ibid, p. 309.
[98] Marwick, *The Sixties* (Oxford, 1998), pp 700-01.
[99] Groot, *The Sixties Unplugged*, p. 215.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.

actually upending societal norms could hardly be described as teen rebels.

At the older end of the spectrum were Pope John XXIII and Margaret Sanger, both in their seventies when they launched their respective revolutions in religion and sex. But even Timothy Leary and George Martin were middle-aged when they put their stamp on Sixties culture.

Then came 1968 and the student protests that flared up across the western world. These were led by people who were genuinely young. Peter Camejo was in his mid-twenties when he organised demonstrations at Berkeley University against the war in Vietnam.[102] In Berlin, thousands of miles from California, prolonged riots broke out in April 1968 following the attempted assassination of student leader, Rudi Dutschke, 28 at the time.[103]

Both men swiftly gained notoriety internationally. Governor Ronald Reagan included Camejo in his list of "the 10 most dangerous people in California",[104] while Dutschke was labelled in the print media as "Red Rudi".[105] As indicated by these epithets, the establishment regarded Camejo and Dutschke as left-wing radicals who wanted to overturn the status quo.

This was true, but how would they achieve their goal? Violent revolution? Or in some other way?

In a speech he made to student activists in 1969, Peter Camejo outlined his thinking. He did not exhort them to take up arms in an insurrection against the forces of the state. What he proposed was a social revolution, because

> The key to victory is moving the masses. Any concept, any struggle that eliminates this will only end in disaster.[106]

Crucially, a strategy of winning support from the people would require patience and understanding by the revolution's leaders. Camejo concluded his 1969 speech by spelling out what he meant:

> You have to have a perspective of fighting for 10, 20 or even more years. Just like the Vietnamese say they will fight 10, 20, or 40 years - whatever is necessary.[107]

Camejo did not explain what those seeking "victory" should actually do during those long decades. But it would involve using society's existing infrastructure against itself, or as he put it, "Capitalism does it for us."[108] At the vanguard of this revolutionary movement would be the third-level students who listened eagerly to Peter Camejo - and also to Rudi Dutsch-

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[102] Peter Camejo, *North Star: A Memoir* (Chicago, 2010) pp. 92-94.
[103] *Evening Echo*, 15 Apr 1968.
[104] Camejo, *North Star*, p. 47.
[105] *Evening Echo*, 15 Apr 1968.
[106] Peter Camejo, 'How to make a revolution in the United States', May 3, 1969.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.

ke. The latter called on students to

> lead a "long march" through the institutions of society, overturning established centers of power from within and without.[109]

Another writer has observed that university students "had the time and the resources to learn about alternatives to the hated culture of the 'establishment'".[110] If those instigating the "long march" were successful, these educational bodies would produce an intellectual elite, imbued with a desire for radical change.

Of course many (perhaps most) of these students would become 'domesticated' once they entered their chosen field or profession, and assumed the responsibilities of family, mortgage, etc. They would probably end up as respectable, vaguely liberal, if somewhat reluctant members of the 'corporate world'.[111]

But what if even a few held onto their youthful zeal? As they rose through the ranks of politics, business, media, etc. and gradually replaced the old guard, would the rest of us even notice?

Until one day we woke up to find ourselves living in a 'new normal'?

BUNÚIS NA RÉABHLÓIDE, ("ORIGINS OF THE REVOLUTION") 5/5

First published: 27 February 2021

Rudi Dutschke may have come up with the slogan "long march through the institutions" in 1967, but the concept predated the Sixties.

Former Trotskyist Peter Hitchens offered an earlier example which he found in one of historian Peter Hennessy's books.[112] In 1945, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), Harry Pollitt (1890-1960) told his members who were studying at Cambridge University that "the Party required them to get Firsts and to secure high positions in the State". As far as these left-leaning intellectuals were concerned, promoting the *Daily Worker* and fraternising with the proletariat were now passé.[113]

The concept of an elite bunch of intellectuals that would dominate society was advocated by an Italian Marxist named Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). He anticipated that "the great masses of the population" would consent to such an arrangement. He warned anyone who demurred, however, that they would be subject to "The apparatus of state coercive

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[109] Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003), p. 180.

[110] Ingo Cornils, "'The struggle continues': Rudi Dutschke's Long March" in Gerard de Groot (ed.), *Student Protest: The Sixties and After* (Abingdon, 1998), p. 102.

[111] David Ghitelman, 'Preparations for the Long March: The Seventies Revisited', *Antioch Review*, 49/1, Winter 1991, p. 76.

[112] *Mail on Sunday*, 23 Sep. 2018.

[113] Peter Hennessy, *The Secret State: Whitehall and the Cold War* (London 2002), p. 22.

power".[114]

For Roger Scruton, looking back at his student days during the 1960s, Gramsci outshone the likes of Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara, and Stalin as a "revolutionary hero", because

> He convinced his following that…learning equals wisdom and that wisdom equals the right to rule.[115]

If intellectuals were to steer society in a certain direction, universities were the obvious place to find them. That is why Dutschke, Camejo, etc., encouraged radicalised students to take the long view and subvert society from within once they were in positions of power.

But did this strategy ever move from theory into practice? In other words, did any of those Sixties students go on to become top dogs in society, exploiting their elevated status to undermine the system they opposed? Without any direct evidence it is impossible to say for certain. All we can do is look at the radical changes that have emanated from the top down over the last half-century or so and ask ourselves a simple question: how else could they have happened?

Peter Hitchens is in no doubt. The transformation of Britain over the course of his life, "especially in sexual and moral matters",

> was done mainly by the revolutionary veterans of the 1960s, finally climbing into the seats of power in politics, culture, broadcasting, education and law.[116]

But is this really a left/right issue - a Communist plot to subvert the West? Or is the "long march" strategy an expression of something deeper – and older?

In *The Communist Manifesto* published in 1848, Karl Marx presented his view of history as a "class struggle" between "oppressor and oppressed" that the latter could yet win "by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions".[117] What Gramsci and Dutschke did in the 20th century was to propose a more indirect way of achieving the same goal.

Who are these "oppressors"? Bourgeoisie? Capitalists? Tyrants? Marx may have defined them as such, but if he had been genuinely interested in unearthing the roots of human oppression he might have used a more accurate term - predators, for instance. Predators hunt those weaker than them, irrespective of their political leanings, status in society, or even wealth, in what is commonly referred to as the 'law of the jungle'.

To pursue this idea further we must leave Marx behind and enter the

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[114] Quintin Hoare & Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds.), *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York 1987), p. 12.
[115] Roger Scruton, *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands: Thinkers of the New Left* (London 2016), pp. 198-9.
[116] *Mail on Sunday*, 23 Sep. 2018.
[117] Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, A.J.P. Taylor, ed. (London 1985), pp. 79, 120.

realm of metaphysics and the spiritual. For Marx, God had no part to play in resolving the 'class struggle'. Marx's perspective was a materialist one, without any acknowledgement of life's spiritual dimension. So it is hardly surprising that he made no reference in his *Manifesto* to mankind's submission to, what Jesus called, "the ruler of this world".[118] Marx identified the enemy as capitalism, not Satan.

Now, as we enter the third decade of the 21st century, success is finally in sight for those who would enslave us. An elite cadre of 'experts' and 'intellectuals', in medicine, politics, and the media, have persuaded the vast majority of people to fear a mythical threat. Whether that threat was concocted in a Chinese laboratory or dreamt up in a Manhattan boardroom doesn't really matter. Those behind it want us to trust them, and only them, to deliver us from the illusory danger they have created. In doing so I believe that mankind would be consenting to its own captivity.

In 1949 the author of *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley, wrote this to his former pupil, George Orwell.

> The lust for power can be just as completely satisfied by suggesting people into loving their servitude as by flogging and kicking them into obedience.[119]

But isn't there a snag? What if, instead of listening to and obeying our potential oppressors, we the people turned for salvation to someone infinitely more powerful than "the ruler of this world"?

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[118] John 14:30.

[119] *Letters of Note* [https://lettersofnote.com/2012/03/06/1984-v-brave-new-world/], 27 Feb. 2021.

MNÁ NA HÉIREANN ("THE WOMEN OF IRELAND")

First published: 13 February 2021

A recent post made me think about something that had never before crossed my mind.[120] What was it like to be a woman in 1960s Ireland?

But how could I know? Not only am I a man, I have no sisters and the only female presence in our home was my mother. And I never discussed such things with her before she died in 1975.

Although my first teachers in the convent school I attended were female, boys and girls were taught in separate classrooms and never allowed to mix. Male teachers only were employed in the single-sex primary and secondary schools I went to later. At my Holy Communion and Confirmation ceremonies girls and boys were separated by the long aisle that divided the church from the altar to the entrance. And of course, my years as a Mass server were all male affairs too.

It was not until I turned 14 that I had my first real contact with girls. The Legion of Mary organised afternoon dances (or 'reunions') for its younger members at a time when social outlets for teenagers were few and far between. I remember being completely awe-struck the first time I saw dozens of scrubbed, fresh-faced young girls lining up on the edge of the dance floor.

But despite these and other opportunities to mingle with the opposite sex, I could never comprehend them. It was only later in life that I began to appreciate the simple truth that women lived in a world designed and run by men.

During the 1960s women were second-class citizens. A host of petty restrictions, not applicable to men, limited their potential and demeaned their lives. Female staff working in the public service and in some private institutions were compelled to resign if they married. Once wed, a wife needed her husband's consent before she could borrow in her own name. She had no right to stay in the family home if her husband chose to sell it.

Women were reminded constantly that their lives were meaningful only in the context of their relations with men. In the 1963 movie, *Charade*, the character played by Audrey Hepburn, then in her early-30s, becomes instantly besotted by Peter Joshua (Cary Grant - pushing 60). When, eventually, he proposes, she expresses the hope that they have "a lot of boys and we can name them all after you".[121]

But if Audrey thought she could relax into domestic bliss after the nuptials, listening to the Jack Jones' hit "Wives and Lovers" (also 1963) might have worried her. The lyrics, written by Hal David, reflect a juvenile view of women and sex that was not uncommon among the *Playboy* set of

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[120] Bunúis na réabhlóide, ("Origins of the revolution") 3/5 on page 64.

[121] *YouTube*, Movieclips, 16 Jun. 2011, "Charade (10/10) Movie CLIP - Whatever Your Name Is (1963) HD", [https://youtu.be/DXTLoQyijJ0], 13 Feb. 2021.

the time. Even though husband and wife are bound by the most solemn vows, the song makes it clear that it is the woman's responsibility to keep the marriage going, because:

Day after day
There are girls at the office
And men will always be men
Don't send him off
With your hair still in curlers
You may not see him again[122]

In Ireland, women had more basic concerns. The sexual revolution launched by Sanger and Pincus did not reach us until long after the 1960s. During the decade itself even those in favour of artificial contraception, like activist Mary C. Prendergast, made their case in the context of family planning and married life.[123] The idea of a young single woman taking the Pill regularly would have been equated with 'illicit sex' which, as Archbishop McQuaid noted, "is a sin".[124]

But was the sin shared equally by both partners? One young Irishwoman who became pregnant outside marriage reflected, "The trouble is nobody would ever know he'd had a child but everyone will know I had a child."[125] Without access to effective contraception, the consequences of sexual intercourse could be life-changing for a woman. This is clear from an interview in 2006 with Mary Margaret McDonagh, a member of the Travelling community.

> You had babies having babies. My husband's mother was married at 14. She had 18 children. My mother was married at 20, she had 15.[126]

But was the solution a new pharmaceutical product (with potentially damaging side effects)? Not if the experiences of those at the forefront of sexual liberation were to be believed:

> Women who sought meaning in sexual relationships were often dismissed as frigid. As the feminist Robin Morgan remarked, 'A woman could be declared uptight or a poor sport if she didn't want to be raped'.[127]

So was the sexual revolution *really* what Irishwomen needed? Until such time as its effects were eventually felt in Ireland, the question remained moot.

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[122] Lyrics, "Wives and Lovers" [https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/3575595/Burt+Bacharach/Wives+and+Lovers], 13 Feb. 2021.
[123] *Irish Independent*, 2 Dec. 1963.
[124] Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (London, 2009), p. 341.
[125] *7 Days*, "All our children", RTE, 29 Nov 1968.
[126] Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin*, p. 351.
[127] Groot, *The Sixties Unplugged*, p. 217.

FADARAÍ ("PATIENCE")

First published: 06 March 2021

When German-born philosopher Herbert Marcuse spoke to students at Antioch College in Ohio, one member of his audience was not impressed with what he heard.

It was the winter of 1971 and David Ghitelman was filled with the revolutionary fervour then sweeping through college campuses across the western world. He was a rebel looking for a cause, and he must have thought this ageing idol of the New Left would supply it. But instead of urging his eager young listeners to rush to the barricades, Marcuse counselled patience. Intellectuals were needed to guide society in the future, he told his audience. The students listening to him should stay the course and pursue the "long march through the institutions". Ghitelman felt disappointed and deflated:

> If was as if he had told us there would be no dessert until we had eaten our spinach. We had come to believe in the politics of instant gratification: If it feels good, do it, do it now. A long march through the institutions, a protracted struggle demanding drudgery and patience, was the last thing we wanted.[128]

Like many young idealists at the time, Ghitelman felt a restless desire for immediate action. But a successful revolution requires thought and planning. Is that why it is often those long past the first flush of youth, like Vladimir Lenin or Ayatollah Khomeini, who actually lead revolutions? Perhaps they have the patience and forbearance to wait until the time is right before acting.

In a recent post I wrote that "the concept [of the 'long march'] predated the Sixties".[129] In fact it may even predate recorded history. In the 17th century a French poet named Jean de La Fontaine published a collection of fables which he adapted from older sources. One of those sources was the famous Aesop who lived six centuries before Christ. If that's not far enough in the past, it is thought that Aesop derived some of his fables from an oral tradition that was already ancient in his day. So a very long time before the 1960s!

Many of Aesop's fables were used to convey a moral or ethical message to the reader or listener. One called "The Lion and the Rat" illustrates how a humble rodent could help the mighty King of the Jungle by gnawing through the ropes that bound him. The lesson is encapsulated in the last two lines of Fontaine's version:

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[128] Ghitelman, "Preparations for the Long March", p. 75.

[129] Bunúis na réabhlóide, ("Origins of the revolution") 5/5 on page 67.

Patience and length of time may sever,
What strength and empty wrath could never.[130]

In my musings on the 1960s I have explored both the origins and the impact of the Cultural Revolution I lived through. But it is clear now that, pivotal as the decade was, it did not mark the beginning of something - or indeed the end. To use a sporting analogy, the 'sound of the Sixties' was like the bell that rings out as runners enter the final lap of a long-distance race.

So, if the finishing line is now in sight, it is important to understand how we got here. And that story does not begin in the 1960s or even in the 20th century. Like Fontaine's or Aesop's fables, the genesis of our present global crisis lies much, much further back in human history.

It is a tale more fascinating than anything Aesop or his successors could have dreamt of. It cuts to the heart of human existence over the aeons we have lived on this planet. Above all it is a tale of the war that has been waged by evil against God, a war that has intensified over the last 2,000 years.

During that time those waging the war have pursued a long-cherished goal. A goal so precious to its adherents that, for century after century, they were willing to devote their lives to fulfilling it – even though they themselves would not be around to see the fruits of their labours. Now *that's* patience.

But what is the goal? Who conceived it? And why? These questions, and others that naturally follow, can be answered only by widening our perspective. That means exchanging the 1960s for less well-trodden pathways of historical enquiry.

In a new blog entitled *History in the Making* I will take on that task.[131] Meanwhile *Na Seascaidí* will continue to reflect my abiding interest in the 1960s.

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[130] Jean de La Fontaine, Gustave Doré, and Walter Thornbury, *The Fables of La Fontaine* (London 1868) pp. 84-87.
[131] See Book II.

AN RÚNSEIRBHÍS ("THE SECRET SERVICE")

First published: 20 March 2021

In August 1971 I was given the piece of paper I needed to move from full time education into the world of work. That document was my Leaving Certificate.

Given that the failure rate in the 1971 exam was the highest to date, I should have been grateful for the pass result I managed to scrape.[132] But any sense of relief I felt was due to the fact that I would not have to go to school anymore. That was all that really mattered to me, although I think my mother felt differently.

It must have been in 1967, during the summer break, that she mentioned the possibility that I would have to leave school following my Intermediate Certificate exam, a full two years before the fateful Leaving. The problem was money. In those days my parents had to pay fees to the Christian Brothers' school I attended. To this day I don't know how much my education cost. But given that I went to an inner city school catering for a working class clientele, I suspect it was not a huge sum, maybe £5 a term.

It doesn't sound like a lot of money but, when every penny counted, keeping me in school was a luxury we could hardly afford. My father was the sole breadwinner and his modest wages had to sustain our family of two adults and two children. As youngsters themselves my parents had followed the widespread practice in our neck of the woods of leaving school at the age of 14 in order to get a job, and their parents before them and so on. The fact that I had been allowed to progress beyond primary school was a privilege I did not appreciate at the time.

Everything changed when free secondary education was introduced in Ireland. The man responsible was Donogh O'Malley, Minister for Education from July 1966 to March 1968. Described by one commentator as "tempestuous and energetic" and "revolutionary by temperament", O'Malley somehow gained the political and religious backing he needed to bring about this historic reform in Irish education.[133]

Undoubtedly O'Malley's decisive act changed my life. Those two extra years I spent in school after my Inter may not have been terribly pleasant, but they did allow me to obtain that all-important Leaving Cert. Even with a pass, I had a chance of a permanent pensionable job in the civil service or the bank. And so it transpired. By October I had made it through the application and interview processes to join the staff at one of the big financial institutions.

As well as being a dynamic and somewhat buccaneering Fianna Fáil politician, Donogh O'Malley was a physically commanding and handsome

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[132] *Irish Independent*, 18 Aug. 1971.

[133] Tobin, *Best of Decades*, pp. 172-4.

man. In 1951 he married a beautiful young Kerry woman named Hilda Moriarty. They were a golden couple. Years earlier Hilda had inspired one of Ireland's greatest poets, Patrick Kavanagh, to compose the verse that in the 1960s was turned into the song, "On Raglan Road".

Much later I discovered one of those extraordinary coincidences that confirms the truth of the phrase, "it's a small world". When they married, Donogh and Hilda went to live in Sunville House, a mansion located in Limerick's fashionable North Circular Road. Half-a-century earlier, Sunville had been the home of Sir Thomas Cleeve, founder and managing director of the Condensed Milk Company.[134] Cleeve built his business into one of the world's leading suppliers of dairy products. His grand-nephew was Brian Cleeve, the writer and broadcaster. It was my good fortune to know Brian during the last 20 years of his life. After he died I wrote his biography, which I published in 2007.

An interesting connection between two men who, in their different ways, exerted a huge influence on the course of my life.

But I suspect an even greater influence was operating behind the scenes. After she died I learnt that, during those early years, my mother had been praying constantly for my success. In particular, during the late summer of 1971, she 'stormed Heaven' with Novenas in support of my job applications. I suspect now that her prayers also contributed to the almost miraculous result I achieved in my exam. Even more fascinating is the thought that her religious devotions may have been instrumental in keeping me at school a bit longer.

I have no idea how prayer actually works, but I believe it does. Of course I am grateful for the intervention of that political whirlwind, Donogh O'Malley. His action opened a door for me that otherwise might have stayed shut. But I also owe a great deal to my mother, a debt I may be allowed to repay one day.

[134] *Limerick Leader*, 31 Oct. 1981.

AISÉIRÍ ("RESURRECTION")

First published: 03 April 2021

I don't have any specific memories of Easter during the 1960s. Christmas was far more important in my schedule, if only for the food and the toys. Of course Easter was also a holiday from school (and we had chocolate eggs!), but it was really a poor relation to the Big Day several months earlier.

Because it commemorates the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead, Easter is actually a much more significant feast in the Christian calendar. The old *Catholic Encyclopaedia* calls it "the corner-stone upon which faith is built".[135]

To honour this special day in this year of years, here is a unique description of the Resurrection itself. It is taken from Brian Cleeve's *The Fourth Mary*, written in 1977 long after Jesus walked the earth.

The book purports to be "the story of the Crucifixion, told from the unfamiliar viewpoint of the enemies of Jesus, of those who planned it and regarded it as their triumph".[136] Although Brian was a successful author with long experience in developing and crafting a story, this one was different.

> I was well aware at all times of exactly what I was doing. I chose the words. The style is mine, with all its faults or personal characteristics. What is not mine is the story. I was told the story, or rather, made aware of it, and wrote it down in my own words.[137]

If you believe that this is true then what follows is an eye-witness account of what many regard as the greatest event in human history. If not, I hope you will read it as a sincere attempt to describe an otherwise ineffable moment.

> And then, as if the stars had grown nearer, there was a light in the sky, a soft haze of light like the stars falling, growing, growing, until the hillside was as bright as dawn, and I felt the light taking hold of me, and not my body but my soul shivering, in terror. The light was gathering round the tomb. I saw my mistress flung to one side as if she was rags, filth swept away by the wind. The stone moved, it rolled to one side, and there was such light behind it, such light inside the tomb, that I covered my eyes and I still saw it, as one sees the lightning. A white blaze of fire, and he was there, walking. Only he had grown tall, and beautiful.[138]

Happy Easter 2021.

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[135] *Catholic Online* [https://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=4116], 3 Apr. 2021.
[136] Brian Cleeve, *The Fourth Mary* (Dublin, 1982), back cover.
[137] Ibid, p. 111.
[138] Ibid, p. 107.

SAPIENS?

First published: 10 April 2021

By the time I started my solo visits to the pictures Cinerama had arrived in Dublin. Cinerama was the last word in movie-going. Instead of passively watching a film, the viewer was plunged straight into the action. Cinerama achieved this illusion through a combination of the widest screen ever, and a multi-track system that filled the auditorium with sound from every direction.

Cinerama was one of several technological advances that gave us a peek into a future that has yet to materialise. For instance there is nothing today like a Concorde plane that nearly 50 years ago could transport passengers across the Atlantic at supersonic speed. And, for all the hype, Imax cannot match the wonder and excitement of the Cinerama experience.

My first Cinerama film was *How the West Was Won* in 1964. A terrific movie but, dare I say it now, a rather one-sided perspective if you happened to be a descendant of the Native Americans who already occupied the "West" before the Europeans arrived? But at the time I was enthralled by the epic story and Alfred Newman's great score. The film also used the new technology to stunning effect, especially in those scenes depicting the frontier landscape in all its rugged grandeur.

Over the next few years I became an aficionado of the Cinerama experience, revelling in the spectacle of *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* and *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. So when *2001: A Space Odyssey* arrived in Dublin during the long summer break of 1968, I hopped on a bus to see one of the first showings at the Plaza in Parnell Square. Nothing in my young life (as a cinephile or otherwise) could have prepared me for what I saw when the lights dimmed and the curtains parted.

The film's director, Stanley Kubrick, used the Cinerama technology to give us a glimpse of the universe as surely only God could see it. The opening scene was essentially a visualisation of "Sunrise", the first minute-and-a-half of *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, an orchestral tone poem composed in 1896 by Richard Strauss. Strauss was in turn inspired by the philosophical writings of Friedrich Nietzsche.

Kubrick matched music and film perfectly, depicting the Sun rising over the Moon, with the Earth in the foreground. It was a stunning introduction to a movie that I suspect would have left even Strauss and Nietzsche spellbound.

Whatever about those two luminaries, a seasoned journalist like the *Evening Herald's* film critic felt the force of Kubrick's vision. He described *2001* as:

> A deeply penetrative spiritual exercise that spans all human history, and then transcends the limits of man's discoveries in a riveting exploration of

the concept of "extra-terrestrial intelligence".[139]

As I was only 15 when I first saw the movie, you could attribute the intensity of my own response to a mixture of adolescent hormones and the still-exciting Cinerama technology. But I suspect there was more to it than that.

Looking back I believe that what really got under my skin was the film's underlying message. This was the proposition that, far from being a natural process, *Homo sapiens* arose in the remote past as a result of an external intervention. What's more, the film suggested that another intervention would be necessary at a future date, 2001, to propel mankind into the next stage of its evolutionary journey.

In short, *2001: A Space Odyssey* was a cinematically-rendered hypothesis of how our species came to dominate the Earth, not as the result of either divine creation or organic evolution, but through the calculated plan of a superior alien race. One might call it 'intelligent design', albeit not the type beloved in evangelical Christian circles.

Since 1968, several other gifted movie-makers have revisited the themes explored by Kubrick. In *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, Steven Spielberg delved deeper into the notion that well-disposed aliens are keen to help mankind. Other films like *The Truman Show* and *The Matrix* played around with the idea of humans as the apparently helpless playthings of a less benign intelligence.

But none came near the breath-taking genius displayed by Stanley Kubrick in *2001: A Space Odyssey.* For me it opened a window into possibilities I had never before imagined.

[139] *Evening Herald*, 27 Jul. 1968.

MITSOUKO

First published: 24 April 2021

It's a long while since I found it funny, but there was a time when I would not have missed an episode of the TV panel show, *Have I Got News for You*. One of its stalwarts was comedian Paul Merton. His deadpan, surreal interventions were often the highlight of the popular news quiz. A recurring theme of his weekly flights of fancy was the absence of the jet pack from the modern world.

Being of the same generation as Merton, I suspect his inspiration came from the 1965 James Bond film, *Thunderball*. The opening scene shows Bond escaping from several armed villains by donning a jet pack and flying to safety. As he takes off the jet pack after landing, Bond remarks to his glamorous companion that "No well-dressed man should be without one". Both get into Bond's Aston Martin sports car, which is equipped with an array of hidden weapons, including a water-cannon that Bond uses to knock his pursuers to the ground.

It is one of the great Bond pre-credit sequences. Is there another movie scene that better encapsulates the 1960s fantasy of the red-blooded, gadget-loving male?

Like other youngsters at the time, I was hooked on the suave superspy played by Sean Connery. I wanted to be like him. It wasn't just his ease with the latest technology. Women were so mesmerised by his animal magnetism that they fell into his arms (and into his bed) without hesitation. As the lyrics of *Thunderball's* theme song explained, Bond did not feel bound by the rules and customs of normal society.

He knows the meaning of success,
His needs are more so he gives less
Any woman he wants he'll get
He will break any heart without regret.[140]

It is easy to see now that James Bond was a self-centred prick, a caricature of a man. But, as I have outlined in a previous post, 1960s popular culture practically deified men as the justifiably-entitled superior sex.[141] A woman's place in that topsy-turvy world was to reflect male glory to an adoring audience. Just like Bond's "glamorous companion" in that scene from *Thunderball*.

As far as I can judge that "glamorous companion's" sole function in the film was to allow us, the audience, to hear Bond's witticisms - like the jet pack quip. Mitsouko, the actress who played the part, had appeared in several Eurospy films in the early-60s. These were low-budget rip-offs of the blockbuster espionage movies then emanating from Hollywood - of which the James Bond series was the most successful.

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[140] *Lyrics.az*, https://lyrics.az/don-black/-/thunderball.html, 25 Jan. 2023.

[141] Mná na hÉireann ("The women of Ireland") on page 70.

Mitsouko's role in *Thunderball* was so small that she does not appear in the credits. Her character is an anonymous agent from MI6's "French station" who accompanies Bond on his latest mission. We do not know what she sounded like because, for whatever reason, her few lines were dubbed by someone else.

Thunderball, while easily the best-known film Mitsouko appeared in, did not give her the breakthrough she might have wished for. She returned to the trashy sub-Bond films where she had begun her screen career and her last movie was released in 1966.

So far in these posts I have tried to avoid falling into the nostalgia trap, of lamenting the loss of the 'good old days' of my youth when everything was much better than today. On the contrary, I have argued that the 1960s was a period of unfulfilled promise and disappointment. The hope that was engendered at the beginning of the decade by John F. Kennedy, 'Good' Pope John, and the Beatles was short-lived. Technological advances like Cinerama, Concorde, and the jet pack did not last.

Unlike these inventions, Mitsouko is barely a footnote in the history of the 1960s. The only reason we know she existed at all is because of those few moments of celluloid when she appeared in the same scenes as Sean Connery. However fame and fortune as a global celebrity eluded her.

But perhaps she found personal satisfaction in a life conducted away from the spotlight? I hope so, but I doubt that she did. Whatever path Mitsouko took after leaving the movie world did not end happily. In March 1995 she killed herself at the age of 52.

CROSBHEALACH ("CROSS-ROAD") 1/2

First published: 08 May 2021

Anyone who has followed my posts will know that as a young boy I was quite religious. This is not to suggest that I was in any sense 'holy' or even 'good'. I was merely following the common pattern of life in inner-city Dublin of the early-1960s. This was just before Vatican II got rid of many of the devotional practices then popular with ordinary Catholics.

The churches were open all day long and people came and went to pray quietly, light a candle, or sit in silence before the altar. The stillness inside a church building was a refreshing antidote to the clamour of the world outside. Whenever I visited a church it was like stepping across a threshold that separated the divine from the mundane.

In my corner of Dublin there were lots of Roman Catholic churches within walking distance of our council estate. About a half-mile away was St James's, our local parish church, where I served Mass for several years during the 1960s. Another half-mile further on was the Liberties, a working-class district on the edge of Dublin's city centre. This is one of the oldest parts of the city, combining the tiny terraced houses of the Coombe and Pimlico with the bustling shops of Thomas Street.

The Liberties contained several fine church buildings, most notably the Protestant cathedrals of Christ Church and St. Patrick. There were many more Roman Catholic churches, all of which seemed to flourish even though they were situated only yards apart from each other. Some were run by the archdiocese, such as the parish churches in Meath Street and Francis Street, while others were in the stewardship of religious orders who answered to no one below the pope.

The Franciscan order managed the Church of the Immaculate Conception on the banks of the River Liffey. This church was known colloquially as Adam & Eve's after a tavern that once stood in the same spot. If this religious house had a rival for the affections of local Catholics, it was the Church of St. Augustine & St. John on Thomas Street. We knew it simply as John's Lane Church.

I loved going to John's Lane. To the right of the main altar was a shrine to Our Lady of Good Counsel. The centrepiece was an image of a mother holding her son close to her. It was a replica of an Italian painting from the Middle Ages depicting the Madonna and child. I did not know that at the time. I just liked looking at this picture of a woman doting on her baby. So I went there a lot.

One of those visits stands out in my memory. It must have been 1963 or 1964, probably during the summer holidays because I was not in school that day. The weather was good enough for me to make the 15-20 minute journey from my home on foot.

As I was leaving the church after spending a little time at the shrine, a

strange thought entered my head.

Imagine if you were to live your life according to God's Will.

It came out of nowhere and I was thrown off guard. Whatever concerns had been occupying my 10-year-old mind that day, I don't believe that was one of them. But I could not help thinking about it, and I found the idea frightening and even repulsive. The prospect of submitting to the Will of God was like contemplating a life sentence inside a prison cell. I imagined God as a capricious tyrant who would treat me as his plaything.

As I stepped onto the pavement outside the church, both these thoughts: the question and my immediate response, passed through my mind in a flash. I suddenly felt panicky, as if I had to run fast from an invisible danger. I needed to stay free! For some reason I turned left towards the city centre rather than take a right to where I lived.

Only a few other sharp memories from those far-off days remain in my mind. But they are mostly to do with big events that anyone might recall, like the Kennedy assassination or the Apollo 11 Moon landings. This was different. This was deeply personal. And it had happened inside my head. Yet it made a lasting impression on me.

Was it a waking dream – or a nightmare? Where did the thought come from - my imagination or outside myself? If it sprang from some external source, did it have my best interests at heart or was it trying to scare me? Was it connected in some way to Our Lady of Good Counsel to whom I had just been praying (although not for that)? What if I had said 'yes' instead of 'no'?

These are some of the questions I have mulled over in the years since then. I am not sure if I am any the wiser now. But I do know one thing. My life was never the same after that day.

CROSBHEALACH, ("CROSS-ROAD") 2/2

First published: 22 May 2021

As I left John's Lane church all those years ago, why did the thought that passed through my mind fill me with horror? Why was the idea of obeying God so dreadful? Was it because of who I imagined God to be?

In my limited understanding as a 10-year-old boy, God was a man. That much was apparent when I read my Catechism. The male pronoun, He, was liberally used in the opening section dealing with God's infinite traits. But the various prayers I had learnt by then muddied the waters somewhat. Three in particular come to mind.

The 'Lord's Prayer' begins with the words, "Our Father". Clearly that prayer is addressed to a male figure. However, the second prayer, the 'Hail Mary', is directed at Jesus' mother, evidently a woman. The third, formally known as the Doxology but we knew it as the 'Glory Be', is a prayer to the three persons of the Blessed Trinity: the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The

first two were obviously male. The third, the Holy Ghost, was represented as a dove in one of the illustrations in my Catechism. Was it a male or female bird? No idea.

According to the Gospels the 'Lord's Prayer' was composed by Jesus Christ. He would have been taught to perceive the Hebrew God, Yahweh or Jehovah, as a male father figure. Hence his prayer to "Our Father". My Catechism explained it thusly:

> We call God our Father, because He gave us life and provides for us with fatherly care.[142]

But where did this leave Mary, Jesus' mother? Surely *she* gave Jesus life having carried him in her womb for nine months? And the shrine I often knelt at in John's Lane church depicted the love Mary felt for her baby son. Was the scene in that picture of Our Lady of Good Counsel not the very essence of motherly care?

Undoubtedly I was drawn to that feminine image. Perhaps Mary was in some sense an aspect of God, but that idea never occurred to me. When the thought of God entered my mind, I saw, not the image of a kind mother, but of a stern man, a man from whom I could not get away fast enough.

Many years later, as I was researching the early life of broadcaster and writer Brian Cleeve, I came across an interesting insight into his thinking as a boy. During the 1930s Brian was a pupil at an expensive, and "fiercely religious", boarding school in England. It was expected that, when they reached the age of 14, Brian and his schoolmates would be confirmed in the Anglican faith.

But Brian was already displaying the independence of mind that would frequently put him at odds with authority later on. Even at this young age he no longer subscribed to many of the tenets of Christianity that he would have to endorse in the Confirmation ceremony.

Perhaps through his reading – he consumed books voraciously – Brian had learnt of the cult of the Egyptian goddess Isis. She was the mother of Horus, the son whom she nurtured and protected. Prior to the onset of Christianity, the cult of Isis spread across Europe, from Sicily to Britain. Isis was revered by her followers as "a universal mother goddess". Her influence may have continued into the Christian era through representations of the Madonna and Child, which some believe were based on the imagery of Isis nursing Horus.[143]

Something about the feminine nature of this deity evoked a strong response in Brian's soul. He proclaimed that he worshipped Isis and was determined not to be confirmed as an Anglican. Although eventually he

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[142] *Catechism* (1951), p. 14.

[143] John Gwyn Griffiths, 'Isis', in M. D. Law (ed.), *Chambers' Encyclopaedia* (15 vols., London, 1950-2), vii, p. 762.

was compelled to relent, Brian identified this episode as the first sign of his rebellion against what he called “masculine Christianity”.

Unlike Brian, I never as a child objected to the formalities of Catholic ritual and practice. On the contrary I embraced them enthusiastically. But that was not the only difference between us. My visceral reaction outside John’s Lane was rooted in fear, not stubborn resistance to the exclusively male God of Christian orthodoxy.

Yet somehow that moment marked the beginning of my own long journey towards a better understanding of God - not as either male or female - but as encompassing both sexes in a divine harmony that we humans might one day try to emulate.

AG DUL SA TÓIR AR NA DEAMHAIN ("CHASING DEMONS")

First published: 05 June 2021

While going through some old papers recently I came across a document that made me pause. It was stuck in a folder along with a number of official-looking school certificates. This was a certificate too, except it had nothing to do with my less-than-stellar educational achievements.

It is a single sheet of roughly A4-sized heavy-duty paper. Most of the text on it is printed, with my own handwriting inserted in a couple of places. This is what it said.

CENTRAL REMEDIAL CLINIC
EVENING HERALD
1969 WALK
This is to certify that
James Bruce Esq.
HAS WALKED * RUN * FLOGGED * or CRAWLED *
WITHOUT CHEATING FROM DUBLIN TO BALDOYLE and back
AND IS HEREBY ENROLLED INTO THE CERTIFIED
JIMMY SAVILE JOGGERS

Back in the 1960s Jimmy Savile was known to youngsters like me as a famous disc jockey. So on a fine Sunday in May thousands of us followed him on the 10-mile walk from the centre of Dublin to Baldoyle racecourse where we were entertained by Dickie Rock and other big names.

Jimmy Savile died in October 2011 at the age of 84. His passing was marked by glowing tributes from showbusiness personalities and British royalty. Attitudes changed quickly though following a TV documentary exposing Savile's secret life. Just over eleven months after his death, the man had become the biggest story and the most reviled figure in the land. His fall from grace was as sudden as it was shocking.[144]

Today the name Jimmy Savile is a byword for sexual depravity on an almost unimaginable scale. A report by the British Metropolitan Police and the NSPCC into Savile's activities concluded that "Savile was one of the UK's most prolific known sexual predators".[145]

Joan Bakewell, who worked in television during that time, recalled how Savile

> once tried to get me to go to his hotel room. But many of the young girls who did go I'm afraid went willingly.[146]

In his reflections on the Savile revelations, newspaper columnist Kevin

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144 Dan Davies, *In Plain Sight: The Life and Lies of Jimmy Savile* (London, 2014).
145 David Gray & Peter Watt, *Giving victims a voice: Joint report into sexual allegations made against Jimmy Savile* (January 2013), p. 24.
146 Andrew O'Hagan, 'Light Entertainment: Our paedophile culture', *London Review of Books*, 34/21, 8 Nov. 2012.

Myers described Savile as "a distillation of some very male disorders".[147] As Myers pointed out, rapists and sex abusers are usually men.

In a previous article I argued that 1960s culture reinforced the common perception that men are superior to women.[148] The sexual exploitation of women by men was condoned and indeed celebrated in the free-for-all that developed during the decade. The advent of the Sixties revolution could hardly have been better timed for a predator like Jimmy Savile.

> [Savile] sat at the epicentre of the nascent British pop scene when it exploded and took over the world. He described it as being like the cork on the breaking wave.[149]

As a young journalist in the late-1960s, Janet Street-Porter quickly became aware of how some celebrities used their sexual 'power' to degrade and demean women. In order to do their jobs, she and her colleagues had to navigate their way through an obstacle course of smutty language, casual groping, and other sexual demands. As she wrote after the Savile revelations:

> Jimmy's behaviour was just an extreme example of what was considered perfectly acceptable at the time.[150]

And it was not just women or girls who were targeted. Street-Porter and Bakewell also recalled how young boys eager for fame and fortune were easy prey for paedophiles in the media and entertainment industries.

Savile continued to visit Ireland after that charity walk in May 1969. His sojourns usually coincided with the annual fundraising drive organised by the Central Remedial Clinic. Savile met lots of people during these trips. He was a regular visitor to the home of politician Charles J. Haughey for instance. Presumably as ignorant of Savile's sexual proclivities as the rest of us, Haughey introduced the celebrity DJ to his daughter, Eimear, then still a teenager.[151]

Despite these coming and goings, there have been no claims (in the media at least) of any impropriety by Savile while he was in this country.[152]

Ireland may have been spared the predations of Jimmy Savile himself, but we had our own more mundane alternatives to contend with. Despite all the commissions, reports, and revelations of sex abuse in Ireland, I suspect we have still not uncovered the full extent of its impact on our society and on individual victims. It is unlikely we ever will. Many of those who endured the pain and humiliation of being abused, often by someone they

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147 *Irish Independent*, 2 Oct. 2012.
148 Mná na hÉireann ("The women of Ireland") on page 70.
149 *Sunday Independent*, 4 Aug 2014.
150 *Mail Online*, 7 Oct 2012 [https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2214350/JANET-STREET-PORTER-More-men-TV-just-Jimmy-Savile-women-sex-playthings.html], 28 May 2012.
151 *Evening Herald*, 31 Oct. 2012.
152 *Irish Independent*, 12 Jan 2013.

trusted, just want to bury their memories.

While Joan Bakewell, Janet Street-Porter, and countless other women were evading sex pests at work, my classmates and I had to deal with a similar menace. As a young schoolboy I learnt to steer clear of those teachers who liked to 'interfere' with some of the boys in my class. At least my time as a potential target was short. Females often had to endure unwanted sexual attention well into adulthood.

Jimmy Savile represented all that was base and sordid about the 1960s. Could someone like him have been quite so "prolific" before or since? Or was he a symptom of a wider corruption at the heart of Creation, the "male disorder" to which Kevin Myers referred?

IS CUIMHIN LE LENNON ("LENNON REMEMBERS")

First published: 26 June 2021

In an earlier post I described the first time I heard the Beatles' "I Am the Walrus".[153] Wow! It made me realise that the B-side of a single could be better than the A-side.

In those days, singles were released on a 7-inch vinyl disc. There was a song on each side but the A-side was the one the radio DJs played. In late-November 1967 the Beatles released "Hello, Goodbye", a catchy pop song sung by Paul McCartney that gave the Beatles their fourth Christmas number 1. However the B-side was much more interesting I thought.

Because the lyrics of "I Am the Walrus" included the word "knickers", some radio stations refused to play the B-side at all. That's probably why I heard it for the first time in a dance hall. The lyrics were nonsensical but George Martin's musical arrangement, particularly the chanting chorus, created a sense of mounting tension that I found mesmerising.

John Lennon took the lead vocal on "I Am the Walrus" and from then on I began to associate him with the more complex and less 'poppy' side of the Beatles' recordings. Unlike most of his showbiz contemporaries, Lennon himself was often reflective and refreshingly outspoken.

In a press interview published in March 1966, he expressed his dissatisfaction with being a Beatle:

> You see, there's something else I'm going to do, something I must do… All I know is, this isn't it for me.[154]

A decade later, now living in New York, Lennon remembered:

> My life with the Beatles had become a trap.[155]

As a youngster lapping up the Beatles' music I had no idea that John Lennon was disenchanted with the group that had made him rich and famous. In particular I was unaware of the huge controversy that almost derailed the Beatles upward trajectory. The trigger was another comment he made during that 1966 interview:

> Christianity will go… It will vanish and shrink. I needn't argue about that; I'm right and I will be proved right. We're more popular than Jesus now; I don't know which will go first -- rock 'n' roll or Christianity.[156]

For a lot of people at the time, Lennon's remarks smacked of hubris and arrogance. When his comments were circulated in the USA during a Beatles' concert tour, they caused a furore. In some American states, radio stations stopped playing Beatles' songs. The group's records were publicly

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[153] An t-eireaball fada ("The long coda") on page 8.

[154] 'John Lennon Interview: *London Evening Standard*, "More Popular Than Jesus" 3/4/1966', *The Beatles Ultimate Experience* [http://www.beatlesinterviews.org/db1966.0304-beatles-john-lennon-were-more-popular-than-jesus-now-maureen-cleave.html], 26 Jun 2021.

[155] John Lennon, *Skywriting by word of mouth, and other writings* (New York, 1986), p. 17.

[156] "More Popular Than Jesus" 3/4/1966', *The Beatles Ultimate Experience*.

burned. Boycotts were threatened. The Vatican denounced the Beatles for their profanity.[157]

But were Lennon's remarks misinterpreted? As he also said in that controversial interview, he believed there was a distinction between Christianity and Christ.

> Jesus was all right but his disciples were thick and ordinary. It's them twisting it that ruins it for me.[158]

Later on he wrote:

> The separation of the church and Christianity was one of my earliest memories.[159]

He was referring to the contradictions he observed from childhood between institutional religion – in his case the Church of England - and what he understood to be the essence of Christ's teachings. As he reflected later in New York:

> [Christians] are so busy condemning themselves and others, or preaching at people, or worse, killing for Christ. None of them understanding, or trying in the least, to *behave* like a Christ.[160]

Throughout his time as a Beatle, John Lennon played his part as a leader of the cultural revolution against the old order. A significant component of that old order was Christianity as represented by the various religious institutions, including the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches. But even then, Lennon displayed a more nuanced attitude towards religious faith than his fellow Beatles.

When, during an interview with the four, Paul McCartney declared that "none of us believe in God", Lennon quickly qualified his partner's remark:

> We're not quite sure 'what' we are, but I know that we're more agnostic than atheistic.[161]

When he asserted that the Beatles were displacing Christianity, I don't believe that Lennon was bragging. On the contrary I think he was issuing a warning about the consequences of what he and his fellow Beatles were promoting. Indeed I wonder if Lennon also felt regretful at being on the 'wrong side' in the war against Christianity, against God.

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157 *Rolling Stone*, 29 Jul. 2016 [https://www.rollingstone.com/feature/when-john-lennons-more-popular-than-jesus-controversy-turned-ugly-106430/], 26 Jun. 2021.
158 "More Popular Than Jesus" 3/4/1966', *The Beatles Ultimate Experience*.
159 Lennon, *Skywriting*, p. 96.
160 Ibid, p. 35. (emphasis in original).
161 'Beatles Interview: *Playboy*, February 1965 (Page 2)', *The Beatles Ultimate Experience* [http://www.beatlesinterviews.org/dbbtspb.int2.html], 26 Jun 2021.

CLUAIN ("DECEPTION")

First published: 10 July 2021

My first pet was a goldfish named Jimmy. I can't remember who christened him. It may have been me. As a boy I was a Jimmy and it was probably the first name that came to mind when I was given the fish. It must have been at the beginning of the "long 1960s".[162] I was very young, maybe four, so my memories of that time are few and far between.

I do remember something specific about Jimmy the goldfish though. That was the day I was told my pet had died. I don't think that Jimmy and I were particularly close. So I was not especially saddened by the news. Being a fish Jimmy lived in a glass bowl full of water. So I probably peered in at him from time to time. Maybe I sprinkled some fish food into his bowl. But I doubt if there was ever any tactile bonding between us. (For his sake, I hope not.)

In fact the reason I remember Jimmy at all is because of the news of his death. Perhaps in an attempt to soften the blow, my father told me that the goldfish had died as a patient in the nearby general hospital. I was too young to understand that St. Kevin's was restricted to ill humans. But something about my father's story did not compute. Perhaps at a sub-conscious level I realised I was being lied to.

It is unlikely that this was the first deception I encountered in my short life. Although I cannot recall exactly when I was given the usual spiel about Santa Claus, I suspect it was earlier. Although eventually I must have uncovered the truth about the fictitious fat man, I have no recollection of how or when. But clearly the news about Jimmy the goldfish left an imprint on my childish mind.

Why do adults lie to small kids? I did it myself when our boys were little. Often the fib is intended to smooth over some uncomfortable truth that the adult feels is too harsh for a child to absorb. Or it may simply be easier for an adult to fob off a child's question about something complicated with the first thing that comes to mind. I suspect a combination of both lay behind my dad's explanation of Jimmy's sudden disappearance. No intention to dupe or deceive me – just a man trying to let his son down as lightly as possible.

Children's ideas about death are a mystery to me. Over the course of the 1960s several elderly relatives died, including my maternal grandparents. I was pretty close to "Ganga", for instance. He was well into his eighties and confined to bed when I used to visit. He died when I was seven but I have no memory of his passing. Whatever I was told must have gone in one ear and out the other. Same with my grandmother who died a few years later. No memories of their actual deaths, and certainly no trauma.

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[162] Na seascaidí fada ("The long sixties") on page 36.

In fact the first funeral I remember was that of an elderly aunt, my grandmother's sister. I suspect the only reason the event stuck in my mind is because of an awkward incident I witnessed. My aunt was a large woman and the coffin must have been a little wider than normal. Maybe no one said anything to the gravediggers because they had dug the standard-sized hole in the ground. Once the prayers were over the casket was about to be lowered into the grave. However almost immediately it got stuck and there was a delay as they tried to make the opening bigger. I'm sure the mourners were mortified.

When I was a boy, widows wore black for several months after their husbands died. And there was a lot of weeping and keening at wakes and funerals. People felt pain and sadness when death visited their families. But (to this young boy at any rate) there seemed to be an unspoken acceptance of death as the inevitable end to life. Although a source of grief for those left behind, death was seen as a natural occurrence.

Is that still the case today? Or in our minds have we severed the link that used to exist between life and death? Instead of being accepted as the completion of one's time on earth, is death now perceived almost as a curse to be put off as long as possible? Indeed, has an irrational fear of death contributed to the current public hysteria over the so-called pandemic?

Millions of my fellow citizens believe that a deadly virus now threatens our society. So convinced are they of this threat that they are prepared to surrender their hard-won civil rights in order to defeat it.

In the face of deception of this magnitude, how trivial that little lie about my goldfish seems now.

AMHRAS ("DOUBT")

First published: 24 July 2021

Regular readers of *Na Seascaidí* will know that these posts are about my memories of life in the 1960s. I supplement my recollections of people and places with research that fills out and contextualises these snapshots of life back then.

Examples are my articles on John F. Kennedy and Jimmy Savile. My personal connections to these men were tenuous to say the least. I saw both of them from a considerable distance while they were receiving great acclaim in a public space. But those memories were vivid enough to push me into a deeper exploration of the culture that spawned such influential celebrities.

But what about the more intimate and personal side of my character? Is it possible to bring back into focus an accurate or authentic picture of the kind of person I was more than half-a-century ago? Is my young self retrievable at all? Maybe it's true that, as a famous novelist once wrote, "The past is a different country: they do things differently there".[163] Was I a different person then?

These thoughts were prompted when I came across a letter I wrote in 1969. The letter was printed in a national newspaper, and was probably my first published piece.[164] Perhaps it is to do with my generation, but I remember being thrilled to see my name in print. That is no longer a source of pleasure or pride today. After all, computers and printers are in practically every home. But back in the 1960s, to have your name printed in a newspaper was a rare privilege.

The subject of my letter was UFOs, or Unidentified Flying Objects, otherwise known as Flying Saucers. My letter was one of several on the subject printed in the same newspaper. When I re-read it I was struck by the cogent language and moderate tone. I might have been discussing something as banal as the likelihood of snow next Christmas. Yet this was a topic that touched on the very nature of the world and our place in the universe.

In the letter I referred to a report by two policemen who had chased a UFO in their squad car:

> I have absolutely no idea why this phenomenon occurred. I will leave it to wiser and better people to answer it.[165]

Such a careful response. I can only assume that my desire to be published overcame any urge I felt to wax lyrical on a subject that fascinated me. Did I calculate that a letter couched in sober terms, even if the topic itself aroused cynicism and mirth in the minds of many, would be taken seri-

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[163] L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (London, 1913), p. 9.
[164] *Evening Herald*, 10 Sep. 1969.
[165] Ibid.

ously by the editor? If that was my thinking it must have paid off because my letter was published.

At that time, and right up to the present day, the subject of UFOs was generally treated with scepticism. A typical example is a US Air Force investigation into UFOs conducted in the late-1960s. The members of the Condon committee concluded in their report that the topic was not "a fruitful field" for further investigation.[166] The message that there was 'nothing to see here' was reinforced by the media. One commentator wrote that "all flying saucer stories must henceforth be swallowed with a large grain of salt".[167]

Yet the establishment's disdainful attitude now seems to be changing. A more sympathetic view of the UFO phenomenon is evident in recent remarks by military, media, and political sources in America, among them former president Barack Obama.[168] During a television appearance last May, Obama took quite a different line to that of the 50-year-old Condon Report:

> What is true, and I'm actually being serious here, is that there are, there's footage and records of objects in the skies, that we don't know exactly what they are. We can't explain how they moved, their trajectory. They did not have an easily explainable pattern. And so, you know, I think that people still take seriously trying to investigate and figure out what that is.[169]

Does this mean we are on the brink of some official revelation about the extra-terrestrial origin of UFOs? Will we be told that the aliens on board are hostile towards us, like those in the movie, *Independence Day*? Or will we be presented with the more benign little grey men imagined by Steven Spielberg in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*?

Would my teenage self have been excited at the prospect of finally getting answers to his questions about UFOs? Possibly, but that reference to "wiser and better people" makes me wonder.

I don't claim to be either "wiser" or "better" now. But one of my long-held convictions has, if anything, been strengthened over the last 18 months. I take establishment rhetoric on *anything* "with a large grain of salt".

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166 *Condon Report*, 1968 [https://files.ncas.org/condon/], 23 Jul. 2021.
167 *Irish Press*, 13 May 1969.
168 *Guardian*, 20 May 2021 [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/20/ufo-obama-cbs-60-minutes-america-aliens], 23 Jul. 2021.
169 *YouTube*, NowThis News, 21 May 2021, "Obama Talks UFOs on James Corden", [https://youtu.be/tKSyYTerGTI], 23 Jul. 2021.

ALBERT REYNOLDS

*First published: 07 August 2021**

In 1997 I had the pleasure of meeting Albert Reynolds. I will always remember his down-to-earth nature and generous spirit. This article examines the origins of the can-do approach that brought him to the top of Irish politics. It was first published by *Scan Magazine* in January 2016 under the pseudonym "Gabriel Conroy".*

* * *

'It's impossible to explain to people today the kind of hysteria generated by the showbands.' These are the words of Father Brian D'Arcy as quoted in *Send 'em Home Sweatin'*, Vincent Power's excellent account of this peculiarly Irish phenomenon. As young people throughout the world were driven wild by Presley-mania and then Beatlemania, Irish youth were no less excited by the home-grown equivalents. Every week thousands of eager fans travelled for miles to hear showbands like the Clipper Carlton, the Royal and the Miami.

In the early days the dancehalls were awful, sometimes without even basic amenities like electricity. Spotting a golden opportunity, two brothers from Roscommon named Jim and Albert Reynolds built a modern ballroom in their home town of Roosky. Within a few years they were running a chain of ballrooms stretching from Clones to New Ross. These had proper facilities like heating, changing rooms for the performers, and polished floors for the dancers.

Of course Albert Reynolds is best known today for his political career. However, the foundations of his later success were laid three decades earlier during his time as a ballroom magnate. He operated according to a few simple principles: treat the customers and acts well, and honour all commitments.

So instead of the usual mangy sandwiches, the bands Reynolds booked were given a hot meal when they arrived – sometimes cooked by his mother - with a crate of beer left in the dressing room after the show. Deals with showband managers were done on a handshake in the hope that enough customers would arrive to make the evening profitable. But Reynolds always paid the agreed fee to the band, whether the turnout was two or two thousand.

Above all, Albert Reynolds was a risk-taker. When he booked a little known British trumpeter for a tour he was not to know that, by the time he arrived, Kenny Ball would have topped the charts with 'Midnight in Moscow'. As a result the halls were packed and Reynolds made a tidy profit. But it could also go the other way. He offered a large sum to entice singer Jim Reeves to Ireland. However, the shows had to be cancelled at the last minute due to the death of Pope John XXIII. Fortunately, Reeves waived his fee and Reynolds was saved from financial disaster.

As a government minister, and later Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds brought his business experience to bear on the political issues of the day. This meant taking risks that were not only personal, but potentially significant for the nation as well. And when they worked out, such as in his handling of the Northern Ireland peace process, the benefits were enormous.

A few days after Albert Reynolds' death on August 21st 2014, Father D'Arcy celebrated his funeral Mass at the Church of the Sacred Heart in Donnybrook. Before the cortège left for the journey to Shanganagh Cemetery, Fr. D'Arcy bid his old friend farewell: 'Albert, may you enjoy eternal peace. May you rest in peace. You were a man of peace.'

CHRISTINE BUCKLEY

*First published: 21 August 2021**

I never met Christine Buckley. In fact I never heard of the woman until she spoke out about the ill treatment she experienced growing up in Goldenbridge Orphanage during the 1950s and 60s. In doing so she highlighted an unsavoury reality that most people would prefer not to consider. Throughout human history the strong have preyed upon the weak. It has happened in all societies at all times. Ireland was no exception.

This article first appeared in *Scan Magazine* in June 2015 under the byline "Gabriel Conroy".*

* * *

In the late summer of 1971, an American professor named Philip Zimbardo conducted an experiment at Stanford University. He set up a mock prison in which volunteer students took on the roles of guards and prisoners. Very quickly the 'guards' became abusive: humiliating and tormenting the 'prisoners' in various ways in a bid to assert their authority. Some 'prisoners' accepted this treatment while others rebelled. Although the experiment should have continued for two weeks, Zimbardo had to end it after six days to prevent things getting worse.

The results of the Stanford experiment are noteworthy in light of the now-familiar accounts of abuse perpetrated in religious institutions such as Goldenbridge Orphanage. Among the practices common to both places were the administering of physical punishment, the rewarding of 'favourites' with better treatment, and the use of numbers rather than names when addressing inmates. Details of what went on in Goldenbridge were revealed by the Ryan Commission in 2009. However the first insights emerged in 1992 on Gay Byrne's radio show when he interviewed Christine Buckley.

Christine Buckley entered Goldenbridge in 1950 at the age of four. Unlike Zimbardo's volunteers she could not leave after six days, but was detained there until she was seventeen. In his report on Goldenbridge,

Justice Ryan described 'a regime that made children feel despised and worthless' and where 'humiliation and degradation were constant occurrences'. Following that report, Christine herself would say only that she still could not speak about all she witnessed because 'the public wouldn't be able to stomach it'.

In Ireland during the 1950s and 60s, Christine Buckley had several disadvantages. She was, in the words of one newspaper columnist, 'illegitimate, half caste, abandoned and female'. On the other hand she was also smart and tough and those qualities helped her survive. She was among the 'fortunate few' in Goldenbridge who completed secondary education. Afterwards she qualified as a nurse and worked with sick children at Our Lady's Hospital in Crumlin. She married and had three children. She managed to create a new life for herself and her family but she could never forget those who had not coped so well.

Christine Buckley became an articulate advocate on behalf of victims of institutional abuse in Ireland. She helped set up the Aislinn Centre to provide practical help and psychological support to survivors of industrial schools and orphanages. She harried the powerful in her pursuit of truth and justice and she was generous to those who responded. When Bertie Ahern resigned in 2008 following financial scandals and economic meltdown, she paid a warm public tribute to the former Taoiseach's 'compassion and courage in standing with us'.

On March 11th 2014, Christine Buckley finally succumbed to the cancer that had dogged her for many years. Her body was laid to rest in Shanganagh Cemetery.

The Stanford experiment showed us that people anywhere can behave badly when given unchecked control over others. Christine Buckley demonstrated that victims need not be crushed by such treatment and can even inspire others to stand up for what is right.

PEADAR MERCIER

*First published: 04 September 2021**

In a series of posts last year I wrote about the pushback against international pop music led by Seán Ó Riada.[170] If the wizard from Cork masterminded the counter-revolution, one of his lieutenants was Peadar Mercier. This tribute comes from the October 2014 edition of *Scan Magazine*.*

* * *

Irish traditional music found a global audience when *Riverdance* exploded onto the stage of Dublin's Point Theatre during the interval of the 1994 Eurovision Song Contest. The *Riverdance* phenomenon marked one of the highpoints of a modern renaissance of Irish music that began only three

[170] Ó Riada an cumhachtach ("Ó Riada the magician") 1/4 on page 10.

decades earlier. And if one man could be said to have started that renaissance, it was Seán Ó Riada.

During the 1960s he gathered around him a small band of musicians, known as Ceoltóirí Chualann, with whom he hoped to recreate the authentic sound of an ancient Gaelic culture. Among the band's members were Paddy Moloney, Éamon de Buitléar, Seán Ó Sé and bodhrán-player, Peadar Mercier.

Peadar Mercier first became interested in the bodhrán when he heard it played during a performance of John B. Keane's play, *Sive*. Under Ó Riada's guidance he soon mastered the instrument and, following his stint in Ceoltóirí Chualann, he was asked to join The Chieftains. It may seem hard to believe now, but during their early years together, The Chieftains were not professional musicians. Back then, playing traditional music was neither fashionable nor lucrative. So, in order to feed and clothe his large family, Peadar Mercier worked by day as a construction foreman. Yet, despite their amateur status, Peadar and his colleagues defined the sound of Irish traditional music for generations to come.

Between 1969 and 1975, Peader Mercier played on four of The Chieftains' albums. On *The Chieftains 2* (1969) the rolling rhythm of his bodhrán brings to life the stately procession of 'Brian Boru's March'. In the following selection of polkas he lets his hair down with some rapid-fire playing on the bones, another traditional percussion device.

As the band toured and recorded throughout the late-sixties and early-seventies, their reputation grew at home and abroad. The release of *The Chieftains 5* in 1975 introduced them to a new, young audience for whom Irish traditional music was becoming trendy. Fame and fortune beckoned. Stanley Kubrick wanted The Chieftains to record the soundtrack to his new film, *Barry Lyndon*. Pressure mounted on the members to turn professional. Now in his sixties, Peadar Mercier decided to call it a day just as The Chieftains were about to hit the big time.

Following his ten-year spell in the public eye, Peadar Mercier became a father figure to a new generation of traditional musicians. He taught Malachy Kearns the techniques of bodhrán-making, which involves stretching goatskin across a circular wooden frame. Kearns is now the leading Irish manufacturer of the instrument, supplying a range of performers from Christy Moore to the *Riverdance* musicians. Which brings us full circle.

Always a modest man, Peadar Mercier spent the last fifteen years of his life away from the limelight. Perhaps unsurprisingly, his death on September 6th 1991 attracted little attention outside his family circle. He was buried without fanfare two days later in Shanganagh Cemetery. In this, the centenary of his birth in 1914, he deserves long overdue recognition for his part in restoring our rich musical heritage.

URBI ET ORBIT

*First published: 30 October 2021**

I never knew or met Kevin O'Kelly but his was a familiar voice on Irish radio when I was growing up in the 1960s. This short biographical piece was originally published in *Scan Magazine* in December 2015.*

* * *

To his colleagues in RTE, Kevin O'Kelly was known affectionately as 'Urbi et Orbit'. This was a pun on the Latin title of the Pope's blessing 'to the city and to the world'. It neatly encapsulated the two major events with which the newsman was associated during the 1960s. The first was his radio coverage of the ground-breaking Second Vatican Council. The other was his television commentary on the Apollo 11 Moon landing in July 1969. However, it is for an entirely different broadcast that Kevin O'Kelly is best remembered today.

On November 19th 1972 he secured an interview with the head of the Provisional IRA, Seán Mac Stíofáin. At the time Mac Stíofáin was masterminding a relentless campaign of bombings and shootings against British forces in Northern Ireland. As he left O'Kelly's home in Dublin after the interview, Mac Stíofáin was arrested by armed detectives. Although the journalist was worried that the IRA might suspect him of collusion in their leader's capture, it seems that the Gardaí had been planning the arrest for some time.

Later that same day, Kevin O'Kelly revealed his scoop to the world by reading a transcript of the interview live on the lunchtime radio news programme. Because the government had banned broadcasts by anyone who advocated violence in pursuit of their objectives, O'Kelly could not play his own recording of Mac Stíofáin's voice.

That recording became central to the State's case that Mac Stíofáin belonged to an illegal organisation, but it needed to be verified by the interviewer under oath. However, when he was called as a witness during the trial, Kevin O'Kelly refused to breach what he saw as his duty of confidentiality as a journalist. The judge responded by sentencing him to three months imprisonment for contempt of court.

Meanwhile, despite the prosecution's failure to deliver its crucial evidence, Mac Stíofáin was convicted of IRA membership and jailed for six months.

Regardless of Mac Stíofáin's conviction, the government was angry that his views had been broadcast at all on the national airwaves. So the Minister in charge sacked RTE's governing board for failing, as he saw it, to comply with his directives. TV and press journalists went on strike in support of their jailed colleague, briefly closing down RTE and several national newspapers. The crisis deepened when the IRA attempted to free their leader from Garda custody. A few hours earlier a bomb exploded in a Dub-

lin cinema injuring dozens of people.

These were tense days and there would be many more during what we now refer to as the Troubles. But Kevin O'Kelly's own troubles ended when he was released from prison after two days in detention. He was only the second journalist in the history of the state to be imprisoned for refusing to disclose his sources.

Following his brief spell as a news story himself, Kevin O'Kelly resumed his role as a reporter and went on to specialise in religious affairs programmes for many more years. He died suddenly of a heart attack on 31st August 1994 and was buried in Shanganagh cemetery.

DISCOVERY

*First published: 18 September 2021**

I must have been 11 or 12 when I first came across Brian Cleeve. During the 1960s he was a familiar face on Telefís Éireann, Ireland's national television station. His programme, *Discovery*, came on just after tea.

In it Brian would explore some facet of Irish life, such as Dublin Airport, fish-farming, or a major waterway like the River Shannon. Occasionally he would delve into more serious issues, like the plight of Ireland's Travellers (or Itinerants as they were known then). But mostly *Discovery* was uncontroversial television broadcast each week between the early evening news and the latest hit show from America.

Brian's work on *Discovery* was recognised in December 1964 when he received a Jacob's Television Award for his scripts and narration.

In 1966, two years after *Discovery* was launched, Brian was dropped from the programme. The news hit the papers, but like many *causes célèbres*, the story vanished after a few days. Years later I looked into the affair that caused so much trouble to Brian at the time. I wrote about it in *Faithful Servant: A memoir of Brian Cleeve* (2007), from which this edited extract is taken.*

* * *

On Tuesday 11 January 1966 the *Evening Press* featured a photo of Brian on its front page under the headline 'Voice wrong Telefís Éireann tells Brian Cleeve'. The article stated that Brian had been dropped as narrator on *Discovery* 'because his voice is not considered suitable for broadcasting'.[171] In the course of an interview with the paper, Brian revealed that he had been told by a colleague that his accent was 'similar to that of the ascendancy class'. This was a reference to the ruling British class who lived in Ireland prior to independence.

When Brian told his wife Veronica that he had lost his job, she was furious. Unbeknownst to him, she phoned the *Evening Press*, Brian's former employer, and told a reporter what had happened. As far as she was concerned, Telefís Éireann was not going to shaft her husband without a fight!

On the day after the *Evening Press* broke the story, *The Irish Times* threw its weight behind Brian's case when it thundered "Is it not now permissible to speak like Erskine Childers? And I mean the father of our present minister. Or to speak as Parnell spoke?"[172] That evening the *Press* kept the story alive by featuring a vox pop on its front page. Representatives from across the social spectrum voiced their support for Brian. An Irish

[171] *Evening Press*, 11 Jan. 1966.

[172] *Irish Times*, 12 Jan. 1966 (Charles Stewart Parnell and Erskine Childers were Irish political leaders from a Protestant background who supported Nationalism.)

nobleman, a docker, a dentistry student and a publican expressed unanimous disapproval of Telefís Éireann's decision. Ann McKevitt, a sales assistant, summed up what seemed to be a popular view:

> Why spend money on elocution lessons if correct delivery of speech is to become a national crime? I'm not in the modern context a fan of Brian Cleeve but I do delight in listening to him. For me he projects the image of the cultured Irishman. This is something we need if we are to correct the stage Irish conception of our men and women abroad.[173]

If that were not enough the *Press* devoted its letters page to the controversy with 'Disgusted Parent' of Mount Merrion and 'Cleeve Fan' from Drumcondra adding their voices to the seeming hordes of viewers aghast at Brian's dismissal.

By Thursday it was all over. The *Evening Press* reported the latest developments under the headline, "Brian Cleeve is back in favour". It seemed that Telefís Éireann was surprised by the media campaign on Brian's behalf and issued a statement designed to clarify its position. If anything, it increased the confusion.

> The decision [to drop Brian as narrator] was taken on purely technical grounds as it was considered that Brian Cleeve's voice was too light in tone for off-camera narration, and Telefís Éireann is satisfied that it can find a stronger and more satisfactory voice for such narration. Telefís Éireann wishes it to be known that it is completely satisfied with Brian Cleeve's appearance on screen and interviewing technique, and has every intention to continue to use him on screen but not as an off-screen narrator.[174]

Next day, the TV critic of the *Irish Press*, Tom O'Dea, reflected the general feeling of bemusement in the wake of this statement:

> ...it seems decidedly odd that Mr. Cleeve should have been allowed to do the narration on *Discovery* for a year and a half before it was realised that his voice was "too light in tone for off-camera narration". In that year and a half, Mr. Cleeve has spoken tens of thousands of words – all of them written and delivered by him under contract. Before that, ever since he first appeared on *Broadsheet* on the day after the station went on air, he had spoken hundreds of thousands of words, as interviewer, commentator, or narrator on several other programmes, both on TV and radio. Presumably his voice is no lighter in tone now than it was when he was put under contract for the *Discovery* series.[175]

Anyone who continued to follow this story after all the fuss had died down would have realised that the decision to drop Brian had nothing to do with his accent, or with his lightness of tone. Within two months, he was delivering voiceover narration on *Discovery* once again. Not long after Brian's association with the programme ended later that year, two Englishmen, Bruce Arnold and Michael Viney, took over as presenters.

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[173] *Evening Press*, 12 Jan. 1966.
[174] Ibid, 13 Jan. 1966.
[175] *Irish Press*, 14 Jan. 1966.

Each of them spoke with a distinctive middle class English accent similar to Brian's. So what really lay behind this utterly bizarre episode?

It is true that the sound of Brian's voice was not universally liked by his colleagues. One man made a point of telling Brian from time to time that his voice made him ill. A producer with whom Brian worked later described his vocal delivery as "saccharine". Perhaps these comments masked deeper-seated resentments towards Brian among certain of his colleagues.

In its early days, Telefís Éireann was a deeply political organisation. The capacity of television to influence Irish life and culture had been well sign-posted in the opening-night speeches when the station was launched. Conservative Catholic organisations like the Knights of Columbanus and Opus Dei were trying to exert their own influence internally and it was rumoured that some Telefís Éireann personnel were among their members. There was also a 'Gaelic' faction within the station whose aim was to promote a pure form of the Irish language, and who castigated anyone who fell short of their ideals. Then there were the radicals committed to social and political change and who saw television as the perfect instrument to bring about the kind of Ireland they wanted.

Perhaps Brian fell foul of one or other of these cliques and had to be got rid of? We will probably never know the truth. What we do know is that the reasons given at the time for Brian's dismissal were completely bogus.

Only for his doughty wife, Veronica, Brian's dismissal might have passed under the national radar and not been rescinded. Thanks to the publicity her intervention garnered, Telefís Éireann backed down and he got his job back.

CONTRÁRTHACHTAÍ 1966 ("CONTRADICTIONS 1966")

First published: 02 October 2021

For a week or two during April 1966 Ireland paused to mark the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising. The jubilee commemorations were everywhere: newspapers, cinema, TV. Even the bus shelters displayed large posters of Patrick Pearse and the other leading revolutionaries.

I don't recall being taught very much in school about the Rising. It was not a topic we discussed at home either. However a plethora of parades, pageants, and prayers for the patriotic dead were scheduled during the jubilee and through these we were given a rapid induction into the bloody origins of the Irish state.

Being confronted with the details of that pivotal week in recent history was a bit of a shock. Gay Byrne summed up the mood of us Dubs, if not the rest of the country, when he wrote of leaving "school at 18 having been told nothing whatever about this period". His solution?

> I would make it obligatory on all citizens between the ages of 14 and 28 to gaze upon the programmes being put out by Telefis Éireann all this week, dealing with 1916.[176]

Not quite 14 (and voluntarily) I watched those programmes, particularly *Insurrection*. This was the centrepiece of Irish television's contribution to the jubilee: a big-budget production dramatizing the events of half-a-century earlier.

It was riveting stuff. Several scenes stand out in my mind: English lancers on horseback charging down O'Connell Street towards the waiting rebels, Pearse, played by Eoin Ó Súilleabháin, standing alone inside the burning GPO just before the final evacuation. But most stirring of all was the episode dealing with what is known today as The Battle of Mount Street Bridge.

As a large battalion of British troops marched along Northumberland Road they were fired on by a dozen rebels occupying nearby buildings. One hundred and sixty soldiers were left dead or wounded on the road leading to the bridge.[177] Telefis Éireann's depiction of the plucky Irish inflicting a bloody nose on mighty Britain filled me with pride in my country.

It was not clear as I watched *Insurrection* that the men who shot so many British troops that day in 1916 were under the command of Éamon de Valera. He might not have been directly involved in what has been referred to as the "Irish Thermopylae" but de Valera was ultimately responsible for the most successful single rebel engagement of the Rising.[178]

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[176] *Evening Herald*, 12 Apr. 1966.

[177] Michael Pegum, 'The Battle of Mount Street Bridge, Easter Week, 1916', *Dublin Historical Record*, 69/2, Autumn/Winter 2016, p. 154.

[178] Tim Pat Coogan, *Éamon de Valera: The man who was Ireland* (New York, 1993), p. 69.

Fifty years later those young volunteers of Easter 1916 were now aged veterans. Although many of them participated in the jubilee commemorations around the country, only one took centre stage. When Pearse and his comrades were executed by the British, Éamon de Valera became the most senior survivor of the Rising's leadership.[179] In 1966, as president of the republic, de Valera issued his message to the nation expressing what he understood to be the thinking behind 1916.

> Political freedom alone was not the ultimate goal. It was to be, rather, the enabling condition for the gradual building up of a community in which an ever increasing number of its members, relieved from the pressure of exacting economic demands, would be free to devote themselves more and more to the cultivation of the things of the mind and spirit, and so be able to have the happiness of a full life.[180]

Ireland in 1966 was at last experiencing something of the prosperity that had eluded the country during the decades of economic deprivation following independence. The degree to which our impoverished state was a result of de Valera's influential role in Irish public life is debated to this day.[181] In any event it is unlikely that many of those who heard or read his jubilee message can have been as interested as he was in "the things of the mind and spirit".

The people were caught in a dilemma between two contradictory attitudes. On one hand they admired the selfless sacrifices made by the heroes of 1916. On the other hand their own self-interest demanded that the economic success they were enjoying should continue and grow. As one newspaper editorial put it:

> 1916 and its aftermath… should become part of the honoured and unforgotten past… inspiring us without dividing us, remembered by us but not obsessing us. It is time for other things.[182]

These "other things" were necessary because, as the paper reminded its readers,

> to-day's world is practical, vigorous, competitive and in a hurry. The danger is that we may get out of step.[183]

As he presided over the Easter Rising commemorations, perhaps it dawned on de Valera that he was the one "out of step" with the people. Back then I was not bothered by such things. And I was not even cons-

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[179] Ronan Fanning, *Éamon de Valera: A will to power* (London, 2015), pp. 34, 47.
[180] *Cork Examiner*, 11 Apr. 1966.
[181] Tom Garvin in *Preventing the Future: Why was Ireland so poor for so long* (Dublin 2004) wrote that de Valera's "strange anti-economic economics informed much of [government party] Fianna Fáil's thinking for a long time." Fanning disagreed, arguing that Ireland's economic woes were largely due to external factors outside the control of any Taoiseach and that de Valera's long tenure at the top provided stability during a time of international volatility. (*Will to power*, pp. 268-9).
[182] *Sunday Independent*, 10 Apr. 1966.
[183] Ibid.

cious of another anomaly in my own situation.

Every week I devoured the stories of British derring-do in my *Hotspur* comic magazine. Yet the soldiers I silently cheered on as I read about their exploits during World War II were part of the same army I watched being shot to pieces in *Insurrection*.

Then, as now, the world is full of absurd contradictions.

BOBBIE

First published: 16 October 2021

To most people he was Bobbie or Robbie. To me he was my father, a rather distant figure - and not just because of the 40-year age gap between us. When that gap spanned perhaps the most turbulent period in modern Irish (and world) history, it became an almost unbridgeable chasm between his generation and mine. Almost.

Bobbie was born in the last year of peace before World War I broke out, and was really a child of the 19th century. When my father entered the world, Ireland was still part of the United Kingdom. The seat of government was in London not Dublin, and the Easter Rising was almost three years away. By the time I appeared on the scene in the 1950s, it must have seemed like a different place to what Bobbie had known as a boy.

My father was a well-known figure around the area where we lived. Not being a driver, he always walked to work in Thomas Street, a journey that took about 20 minutes each way. This brought him past a variety of shops, such as Lockhart's butchers. There he might pick up an ox tail or a sheep's head, which my mother would turn into a stew for the family's dinner.

There were several pubs along Bobbie's route as well, but he was not a customer. He was a non-drinker, as was my mother. They might have a glass of sherry at Christmas, but otherwise alcohol was not a feature of life at home. I never saw Bobbie tipsy, let alone intoxicated. But he did have one secret 'vice', although not so secret really.

Apart from Guinness's brewery, whose offices and warehouses dominated the area, the most significant building locally was the Roman Catholic Church of St. James. Invariably, on his way home from work in the evening, Bobbie would drop into the church and we might not see him for hours. His purpose was not to light candles or say a few prayers, although he may have done both. He was there to help out.

These were the days before parish committees made up of lay folk came into vogue. Bobbie had no specific job or function. Perhaps he just liked being involved at the centre of local religious life. Sometimes I tagged along and saw for myself the sorts of things he did.

Once I stood beside him in the belfry as he sounded the Angelus. As he clung to the thick rope I was horrified to see him being pulled maybe 10 feet off the ground by the weight of the massive bell as it swung back and forth above our heads. At the weekend, I might accompany him as he went door-to-door around Mount Brown collecting the little envelopes into which parishioners had put whatever they could give towards the running of the parish.

While he spent a lot of time on these and other parish-related activities, mostly Bobbie was to be found in the Parochial Hall right next door to

the church. As well as being the focus of social life in our little community, the hall was a source of revenue for the parish. Various groups hired the hall for their meetings, competitions, or jumble sales. It was also a venue for bigger events like plays, variety shows, and dancing contests. Every winter a pantomime, such as *Babes in the Wood* or *Robinson Crusoe*, would entertain packed houses and brighten up the dark days after Christmas.

As far as the Parochial Hall was concerned, Bobbie's role was to 'keep an eye on things' on behalf of the parish priest and his curates. Their religious duties would not have allowed much time for the day-to-day maintenance and running of a busy venue like the hall. So they were probably glad that someone like my father was willing to devote himself to making sure the place functioned as well as it did.

While I have fond memories of my times hanging around the Parochial Hall, another aspect of life in those early years made a greater impression on me. As I described elsewhere, the highlight of my week was travelling into town with my father to see the latest show at one of Dublin's many picture houses. I have no doubt that my lifelong love of cinema developed out of those childhood trips.

Sitting in the auditorium of the *Grafton*, for instance, we shared many a chuckle as we watched the Three Stooges or Laurel & Hardy lark about on the big screen. Maybe Bobbie had also laughed at their antics when he was a youngster. I don't know.

What I am sure of is that, for a few hours on a Sunday afternoon, that chasm I mentioned was no longer there.

CUIMHNÍ NÍOS FEARR ("BETTER MEMORIES")

First published: 13 November 2021

During the Jubilee commemorations of the Rising more than a half-century ago we learnt a lot about the role of Patrick Pearse in leading that rebellion. On Easter Monday 1916 he marched his troops into the General Post Office on O'Connell Street, thus launching a military struggle against British rule that, six years later, resulted in the establishment of the Irish Free State.

What we did not hear much about, at least in my school, was Pearse's prior role as a teacher and his interesting views on the education of children. Perhaps there was a logical reason for that omission.

Until I was 18 I attended Primary and Secondary schools run by a Roman Catholic religious order known as the Christian Brothers. The Christian Brothers were celibate males who wore a habit of black soutane and stiff white collar - just like Catholic priests. It was not only their outward appearance that made priests and brothers look alike in my young eyes. Together they formed a religious caste that dominated Irish society up to the second half of the 20th century. But even more than their ordained counterparts, the Brothers promulgated a version of Christianity that was almost misogynistic in its fearful attitude towards sex and women.

Looking back now it is not just the Christian Brothers' narrow-mindedness that lingers in my memory. What stays in my mind to this day is their casual brutality, which I witnessed and experienced as one of their students. I recall vividly a scene in class when a Brother punched a boy of 12 so hard in the face that the blood from his broken nose spattered across the white wall behind him. While such violence was thankfully rare, the teachers, lay and religious, often responded to even minor infractions with several whacks of the leather on the outstretched palm of the offending pupil's hand. This was in the 1960s, only a half-century after the execution of Patrick Pearse.

Pearse himself had been taught by the Christian Brothers and it has been claimed that his parents removed him from school after he was beaten for defending his brother Willie against what he believed to be unjust punishment.[184] Whatever the truth behind that story, Pearse had mixed feelings about the order. He was grateful that the Brothers taught him to speak and write in the Irish language. On the other hand, Pearse deplored their concentration on examination results as *the* mark of success. This led to boys being crammed full of information, rather than encouraged to develop their intellectual curiosity and a love of learning. Pearse characterised this approach as "instruction without education".[185]

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[184] Patrick C. Power, *Once a Brother: An Irish Christian Brother's story* (Belfast 2008), p. 126. Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse: The triumph of failure* (Dublin 2006), p. 11.
[185] quoted in Edwards, p. 18.

A few weeks before he died, Pearse published "The Murder Machine", a collection of his writings on the subject of education. In it he condemned the existing system as

> a machine vast, complicated, with a multitude of far-reaching arms, with many ponderous presses, carrying out mysterious and long-drawn processes of shaping and moulding… It grinds night and day; it obeys immutable and predetermined laws; it is as devoid of understanding, of sympathy, of imagination, as is any other piece of machinery that performs an appointed task.[186]

And that task, according to Pearse was "turning out citizens according to certain approved patterns".[187]

In 1908 Pearse decided to put his ideas into practice by founding his own school, St. Enda's in Rathfarnam. Although he abhorred all forms of punishment, physical or otherwise, as headmaster he did not prevent his teachers from administering the cane. However he preferred to inspire and encourage the boys rather than threaten them with dire consequences for their misdemeanours. Pearse's faith in his students won not only their admiration and respect for him personally, but also their willing acceptance of the code of conduct he expected of them.

If he had lived rather than died in 1916, Pearse's innovative thinking would surely have enhanced the decisions of any Irish government of which he was a member. Who knows what he might have accomplished in education alone? Pearse's constant emphasis on the freedom of individuals to develop their talents and skills would surely have transformed the lives of countless Irish citizens, leaving us all with better memories of our schooldays.

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[186] Patrick Pearse, *The Coming Revolution: The political writings and speeches of Patrick Pearse* (Cork 2012), p. 18.
[187] Ibid, p. 26.

CEACHT NA TOIRTÍSE ("THE TORTOISE'S LESSON")

First published: 27 November 2021

My childhood experiences as a pet owner were not particularly happy ones. I have previously related the story of my goldfish and his sad demise.[188] I was apparently given a second chance by my parents because, at age 11 or 12, I was once again the owner of an animal, this time a tortoise.

I remember very little about that tortoise. Was it male or female? What was he or she called? I have no idea. So I guess I'd better just refer to it as the "tortoise", and use the male pronoun throughout.

It must have been early spring when I found my tortoise in our back garden. I had not seen him for a long time. When he turned up again I guessed that he had been hibernating for the winter. Now that the sun was warming up our north Atlantic island again, it made sense that he had emerged from his long sleep.

I recall lifting up my pet to have a closer look at him after his lengthy absence. However he must have been alarmed by my action because he defecated on my hand as I picked him up. I was so alarmed myself that I dropped him to the ground.

Unfortunately I was standing on the paved part of our back yard. There was insufficient time for the tortoise to retract his head before hitting the hard surface. So when I took him up again I spotted some blood around his mouth where he must have been injured in the fall. I was horrified.

I decided to bring him further down the garden and bury him in the earth. Insofar as I had thought this through at all, I believed that I was simply putting the tortoise back into hibernation so that he could recuperate. I probably imagined that he would appear again in a few days as right as rain. Of course that did not happen and I never saw him again.

Filled with shame I did not tell my parents of the tortoise's brief reappearance and the terrible incident that followed. As far as they were concerned he had vanished months earlier never to be seen again. I did not enlighten them. We carried on as if the tortoise had not existed, or at least had not survived the winter.

Maybe it was thinking back to my goldfish that brought the tortoise to mind. Both childhood experiences left me with an aversion to ever again having a pet. True, as I grew into adulthood, there were one or two cats and later a dog. Yet it never felt right somehow and with each passing day that feeling became stronger. I now find the idea of one species, *Homo sapiens*, 'owning' another to be utterly repugnant.

Elsewhere I have detailed my scepticism at the widely-held assumption that humanity is the dominant species on Earth, and that we can do

[188] Cluain ("Deception") on page 90.

what we like with the planet and its resources, including the fauna.[189] Whether through animal testing, hunting for sport or profit, or intensive farming, this assumption has led to untold, and perhaps unimaginable, suffering by our fellow creatures. As I mentioned above, I believe that pet-owning is also wrong, on a par perhaps with owning human slaves, however kindly the owner treats them.

It is a pipe dream perhaps, but I would like to see humanity make some gesture of atonement or reparation to the beasts of the Earth for our barbarity towards them. (I would certainly love a chance to make amends to my pet tortoise.)

But then I wonder. Perhaps current events are already taking care of that. Are we now going through some kind of karmic readjustment that will restore balance to our world?

For nearly two years, *Homo sapiens* has been immersed in a state of mass hysteria that could destroy us completely. We humans have become so obsessed with the threat posed by an undetectable virus that we are turning our civilisation upside down in order to defeat it.

Are the other creatures on this planet completely uninterested in our self-inflicted miseries? Or do they feel their own form of *schadenfreude* towards us? For instance would lab rats find it amusing that, through their participation in new drug trials, their human tormentors are submitting to experimentation themselves?

Of course I am guilty here of anthropomorphism in projecting human feelings onto creatures I do not understand. But until such time as we can unlock the mysteries of the animal mind, what else can we do except follow this line of thought a little further?

If it turned out that anthropomorphism is closer to the mark than we think, maybe we would find that our fellow creatures are not as shallow or as petty as we are. Is it even possible that they actually feel sorry for us right now and, like dolphins that come to the aid of stranded swimmers, may even want to help us?

If so it is more than we deserve. And if it were true, wouldn't we be foolish to 'look a gift horse in the mouth'?

[189] King of the world! How mankind leapt to the top of the evolutionary tree on page 146.

ADUANTAS ("UNEASE")

First published: 08 January 2022

I don't think I ever saw a doctor when I was a child. Maybe it was the cost, or perhaps we regarded doctors and the medical establishment with suspicion and fear. "An apple a day keeps the doctor away" was a familiar saying. It never motivated us to eat healthily. But that maxim was a reminder to keep doctors at a distance.

Occasional childhood illnesses were usually treated with some hideous-tasting medication purchased from a local pharmacy (and maybe a few days off school – or even longer). One of my fondest memories is having the mumps and being in bed for several weeks while my cheeks deflated. I spent the time reading Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby* from cover to cover. Bliss.

Although childhood vaccinations were pretty common when I was a boy, even they did not bring me fully into the medical orbit. In fact I can't remember ever being jabbed when I was a youngster. For instance I did not have any of the tell-tale pimples on my upper arm which were a side effect of the BCG shot. This was a popular vaccination during the 1950s and 1960s and was promoted as the best way to halt the spread of tuberculosis (TB). Why did I not receive this inoculation? Was it because I was afraid of needles?

That might explain the one vaccination I can recall. On a visit to a local clinic with my mother I was told to open wide as a sugar lump with a dollop of goo on top was put into my mouth. Apparently this was a vaccine against polio, introduced in oral form as an alternative to the dreaded syringe.

If doctors or nurses were not part of my life growing up, I was more familiar with the dentist's chair – but thankfully not as familiar as I might have been. Let me explain.

Neither of my parents had their own teeth. Like most adults I knew back then, they wore dentures top and bottom. We never discussed dental matters at home but there was an unspoken assumption that having all one's teeth extracted in late teens or early adulthood was a given. This extreme measure was taken because of the absence in our corner of working-class Dublin of much in the way of dental hygiene. We never brushed our teeth, even after scoffing an occasional sweetmeat like a sugar sandwich. So complete toothlessness would mean no painful problems in later life, and no expensive visits to the dentist.

For me the process began at about 14 or 15 when I had a couple of already-decaying molars removed under anaesthetic. But it never went any further and I retained most of my teeth into adulthood. I was terrified the first time I sat in that chair and I guess I threw a tantrum when the ether-soaked mask was placed over my face.

Is this why I managed to miss at least some childhood vaccinations - and avoid lifelong denture-wearing? Not due to a principled stand by my parents against unnecessary medical interventions. But because I raised such a terrible rumpus at the sight of a white-coated figure looming over me that my mother said to herself: "Never again!"?

Whatever the truth I'm glad today that I managed to retain most of my natural teeth. I am a little more ambivalent about those vaccinations though. On the one hand I never had polio so maybe that vaccine worked. But I did not contract TB either, despite not receiving the BCG jab.

What I now realise though is the importance of following my instincts, whether as a child or an adult. Sometimes all it takes is an internal decision that affects no one else. Occasionally it means taking a stand against subtle pressure from another person by just saying 'No'.

But when I was a child I had no idea why I felt as I did about doctors and dentists. I just knew I did not like what they were trying to do to me. So I kicked and I screamed because that is all I had. And if my mother was sufficiently embarrassed by my behaviour not to risk a reprise, then I learnt a valuable lesson. Making a fuss sometimes pays off. So that's another debt I owe her.

FÍRINNE AN SCÉIL ("THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER")

First published: 22 January 2022

Two years ago, when I started writing about the 1960s, I was not interested in bringing readers on a nostalgia-rich visit to the golden age of my youth. Yes, it was great to be alive back then and my memories of the sights, sounds and smells of that time were a resource I would have been foolish to ignore.

Memory can be fickle though. Some moments stand out in my mind, but others are lost forever. My very first memory is of gazing at the smoke from my father's cigarette as it swirled around the ceiling of our living room. Another is from a few years later when I stood beside my mother in Parkgate Street and watched in wonder as the limousine bearing US president John F. Kennedy passed by only yards away.

Given the historical significance of Kennedy's visit to Ireland, and his tragic death a few months later, it is no surprise that I should recall that day in June 1963. But why has the apparently trivial sight of those tobacco fumes stayed with me? And what people, places, or events have I misremembered or forgotten completely. And what about the stuff I was just too young to appreciate as it was happening?

So I have had to augment my reminiscences with a lot of reading and research. But that work is not just about filling the gaps in my own sporadic recollections. I want to understand the cultural revolution with which the 1960s will always be associated. Was it really the result of a spontaneous outpouring of youthful exuberance and creativity, like a volcano erupting and unleashing its long repressed and violent energy? Or was it the execution of a carefully-laid plan to re-engineer society permanently, to alter the course of history - a worldwide psychological operation, or psy-op for short?

To even consider the second possibility requires a leap beyond what most people regard as legitimate enquiry. It means delving into matters commonly dismissed as 'conspiracy theories'. This term is used, often by media sources, to dissuade us from exploring certain topics. But as I argued in another article, some conspiracies have been exposed, not as theories but as facts.[190] These were not conspiracies concocted by a few lunatics. The perpetrators were pillars of the establishment, governments even.

Nonetheless, an international operation, centrally-controlled, to subvert the very fabric of our society? Surely even the most open-minded (or credulous) researcher would not be led down that particular rabbit-hole?

Then came the pandemic.

Shortly after I launched *Na Seascaidí*, our planet was turned on its head by the World Health Organisation's (WHO) declaration of a global pan-

[190] The "appalling vista": When conspiracy theories come true on page 131.

demic. According to *The Irish Times*, the declaration was made in a bid "to shock lethargic countries into pulling out all the stops".[191]

In Ireland, the government wasted no time in "pulling out all the stops". Schools were closed overnight. A plethora of TV ads, posters, leaflets, outdoor signage, etc. appeared instantly as if by magic. The newspapers predicted a death toll of up to 85,000.[192] Shops were closed and citizens were told to stay at home.[193]

But it was all a fraud. As I outlined in another article, the WHO declaration and the subsequent restrictions imposed by governments were based on deliberate deception.[194] I described several elements of the fraud in my article. Indeed the very existence of SARS CoV2 is doubtful in light of a credible claim that scientists and medical experts did not properly isolate and identify such a virus as the cause of the alleged pandemic.[195]

The true purpose of the scam remains unknown. I examined a couple of possibilities in a two-part series published elsewhere.[196] Whatever the underlying objective may be, the fact that governments, private business, media, etc., have colluded to dupe the people makes one thing clear. Those behind a deception of this magnitude are capable of virtually anything. If they could lie about Covid-19, what else are they lying about?

Of course, without hard evidence nothing can be proven to the satisfaction of any impartial observer. But what conspiracy would allow its machinations to be published in documentary form for all the world to see? All I can do is point out inconsistencies and quirks in the official narrative, raise reasonable questions about what we are told has happened, and apply common sense to discerning what is true and what is false.

What I have researched and written about in this blog has persuaded me that the cultural revolution of the 1960s, like the Covid-19 pandemic, was founded on deception. This causes me some discomfort as I have had to acknowledge the possibility that many of my cherished beliefs and assumptions about that decade are untrue. Nonetheless I found that, not only was the official narrative full of holes, but the evidence pointed in the *opposite* direction.

However nothing is conclusive. I cannot demonstrate beyond doubt that, for example, Lennon & McCartney did not compose "Eleanor Rigby, "Norwegian Wood", and many other great Beatles' songs, or that Neil

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191 *Irish Times*, 11 Mar. 2020.
192 *Irish Independent*, 10 Mar. 2020.
193 *Irish Times*, 28 Mar. 2020.
194 Divided Nation: Ireland in 2021 on page 125.
195 *Fluoride Free Peel* [https://www.fluoridefreepeel.ca/fois-reveal-that-health-science-institutions-around-the-world-have-no-record-of-sars-cov-2-isolation-purification/], 22 Jan. 2022. As far as I know, this information has not been published by any mainstream news source.
196 Green or Gold? (Part 1): The "Gold" Agenda on page 135

Armstrong never walked on the Moon, or that the CIA promoted and distributed illegal drugs like LSD. But I have uncovered enough evidence to raise serious questions in my own mind about these and many other accepted 'facts'.

Who knows? Maybe one day we will learn the full truth about the 1960s. Until then I remain sceptical about what we *think* we know about that period.

The lesson I have learnt from Covid-19 is that we humans can be deceived by the very people we entrust to run our world. The behaviour of our rulers in hiding the truth has confirmed the wisdom of a dictum usually attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte:

History is a set of lies agreed upon.[197]

[197] *Quote Investigator* [https://quoteinvestigator.com/2016/07/05/fable/], 22 Jan. 2022. '10 Napoleon 'Bonaparte quotes in context', *Shannon Selin* [https://shannonselin.com/2014/08/10-napoleon-bonaparte-quotes-context/], 22 Jan. 2022.

BÁS AN CHEOIL ("THE DEATH OF MUSIC")

First published: 06 February 2022

Were you there "the day the music died"? That phrase from Don McLean's hit "American Pie" sums up for me the impact of the 1960s pop revolution. The death of music.

I have described in another article how one man tried to stymie that revolution, at least in Ireland.[198] But nothing could halt the juggernaut for very long and by the end of the 1960s British and American pop had spread to virtually every part of the world. So what were the consequences for our musical tastes? The answer dawned on me recently when I was listening to some old episodes of the long-running BBC radio series, *Desert Island Discs*.

For those who don't know this venerable British institution, each edition consists of an interview between the host and a well-known guest. The big difference between it and other chat shows is that the interviewee must choose eight records or discs for their possibly lengthy stay on a mythical desert island. It is a rather quaint way of allowing listeners to hear what the guests regard as their favourite recordings.

In May 2011 listeners, rather than famous guests, were asked which discs they would pick if they were on the show. The results can be seen on the *Desert Island Discs* web site. As well as the top 100 tracks, the site also shows what it describes as "Your Top 100 Artists". Here are the first five:

> 1) The Beatles, 2) Bob Dylan, 3) Ludwig van Beethoven, 4) Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, 5) Pink Floyd

To find out who might have participated in the poll we must turn to the BBC's own research:

> The average age of the Radio 4 listener is 56 years old and skews towards an older audience.[199]

So that "older audience" would probably include people like me who grew up in the 1960s. Does this explain the mix of Beethoven and the Beatles in the list?

In an earlier post I recalled how exciting I found the Beatles when I first watched them perform in a cinema newsreel.[200] But I did not mention another musical influence I came across while watching our new black-and-white television: Herbert von Karajan conducting the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Karajan's quiet intensity as he brought to life Beethoven's Fifth Symphony was quite different to the hysteria whipped up by the Beatles in that clip, but the impact on my young mind was equally mesmerising.

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[198] Ó Riada an cumhachtach ("Ó Riada the magician") 3/4 on page 12.
[199] BBC Marketing & Audiences, *BBC Radio 4: 44 Minute Drama* (c. 2017).
[200] An t-eireaball fada ("The long coda") on page 8.

I never thought about it at the time, but I must have accepted implicitly that the best pop music was just as worthy of my attention as anything by the greats of the classical world, like Beethoven or Mozart. Much later that talented writer Melvyn Bragg dismissed distinctions between classical and popular music as "the refuge of the merely snobbish". In the same article Bragg reflected the attitude of many children of the 1960s when he wrote:

> There are times when Beethoven takes you into his music so overwhelmingly that you feel your skin will burst with the sound inside your body. Yet listening to or, better, listening and dancing to the Beatles can provoke a not dissimilar ecstasy.[201]

Among the very first albums or LPs I bought in the late 1960s were the soundtrack to Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* and the latest release by Welsh singer, Tom Jones. The first featured classical music so modern that two of its featured composers, Aram Khachaturian and György Ligeti, were still alive at the time. But I was also entranced by the sound of Tom Jones's powerful voice. So I saw no contradiction in liking both.

I still like both, but I do not regard them now as indistinguishable works of art. A legacy of 1960s cultural conditioning is the insinuation that we are snobs if we value one above the other. Melvyn Bragg would have us believe that Paul McCartney and Andrew Lloyd-Webber are the modern-day equivalents of Beethoven and Mozart. But they are not.

What the *Desert Island Discs* poll demonstrates is the truth of Noël Coward's quip, "Extraordinary how potent cheap music is". It's safe to assume that if such a survey were taken among a younger audience, Beethoven and Mozart would be well down the rankings, supplanted perhaps by the likes of Queen or Abba.

What happened to music during the 1960s was akin to the alchemy said to have been performed by medieval necromancers. Gold was replaced by lead. So, whether we listen to Beethoven or not, we are all the poorer as a result.

But can this shift in musical tastes be linked to a specific date, as these lines from "American Pie" suggest?

> I saw Satan laughing with delight
> The day the music died.

Could it have been Tuesday September 11th 1962, the day I proposed in an earlier article as the launch date of the 1960s cultural revolution?[202]

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[201] *Irish Times*, 23 Sep. 2000.

[202] Tosaíonn an réabhlóid ("The revolution begins") 3/3 on page 34.

DOMHAN GAN AIRGEAD ("A WORLD WITHOUT MONEY")

First published: 26 February 2022

It was 1961 or 1962 when I saw *Francis of Assisi* in the cinema. This biopic starred Bradford Dillman as the medieval monk who founded the Franciscan order and became a popular saint after his death in 1226. What follows is my attempt to combine what I learnt from the movie with my other research into Francis' life.

Several scenes from the movie stand out in my mind, particularly the one where a scruffy-looking Francis pleads with Pope Innocent III (played by Finlay Currie) to approve his plan for a new religious order. The pope expresses doubts, telling Francis that the proposed rule for his new order is "too ambitiously severe". One of the pope's aides agrees, saying to Francis that "your strict adherence to absolute poverty is unrealistic".[203] Eventually, however, the pope relents and gives his approval to Francis' request and so the Franciscans came into being.

Elsewhere I have argued that Jesus in his public ministry sought to wean us off our dependence on money.[204] He could see that as long as we regarded money as essential to life itself we would never free ourselves from evil's grip. However, a clear sign of how little impact Jesus' message had is the obvious wealth of the Church, in Francis' day and ours.

But all is not lost. Throughout history individuals have popped up from time to time to remind us of Jesus' teaching about money. One such was Francis of Assisi.

When, as the Gospels report, Jesus advised a young man to "sell what you possess and give to the poor", Francis took it personally. [205] He did not regard Jesus' words as directed only at someone who lived a long time ago in a far off country. Francis believed they applied to himself, and to anyone else who wanted to follow Jesus - including the Church's top leaders. This is what the pope and his advisors found hard to swallow.

In his own writings Francis demonstrated how much he shared Christ's contempt for money:

> The true brother values money no more than a pebble; in fact, if he values money as much as a pebble, he is running a real risk. It would be a terrible thing for those who have chosen the road of abandonment to lose the whole kingdom of heaven for such a trivial thing.[206]

But the Church did not think that money is a trivial thing, and nor did the Franciscans. Within Francis' lifetime the order he founded was already watering down his rule. This is illustrated during a scene in the movie

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[203] *YouTube*, Arch Crusader1, 26 May 2013, "FRANCIS OF ASSISI" (45:48), [https://youtu.be/eM4PtT0rJp0], 19 Feb. 2022.

[204] Money (Part 3): A warning from the past on page 221.

[205] Matthew 19:21.

[206] Lawrence Cunningham (ed.), *Brother Francis : an anthology of writings by and about St. Francis of Assisi* (New York 1972), p. 102.

when Francis, just returned after a long absence and appalled at the luxurious trappings he finds at Franciscan HQ, confronts the order's new head, Brother Elias.

Elias tries to persuade Francis that, as a rapidly-growing organisation, the order needed a lot more than their founder's example could provide. In fact, Elias states, "Without property or power the order can't exist". Francis disagrees, citing the simplicity of his original rule:

> Our lord himself dictated our rule and therefore it should be obeyed literally, without interpretation. Without interpretation![207]

But whether he did so consciously or not, even Francis of Assisi *did* interpret the scriptures. This was because, as I indicated elsewhere, Jesus did not explain how his followers could disengage from the world's money system.[208] So in creating a rule for his new religious order, Francis had to figure out a practical way for himself and his fellow monks to live. His solution was for the brothers to become mendicants, or beggars.

> When the need arises, [the brothers] are to beg without any sense of shame, remembering our Lord, who "set his face like a flint stone" and was not ashamed. Jesus, like Mary and the disciples, was a poor man and a wanderer; he was not above accepting charity.[209]

Francis followed his own injunction, begging from those with enough to spare so that he and his companions could eat.[210] But did Francis fully understand what Jesus was getting at?

The Gospels record that Jesus accepted gifts and hospitality from various benefactors.[211] So, as Francis observed, he was certainly "not above accepting charity". But there is no mention of Jesus actually *begging* for anything for himself or his followers. To do so would have meant becoming dependent on the financial system he abhorred. Instead Jesus relied on God's beneficence, as manifested through the kindness of others.

When he told his apostles to go about the country preaching, Jesus did not instruct them to seek their "daily bread" with hand outstretched to those they met. Like Jesus himself, they could accept whatever hospitality they were offered, but they were not to barter their favours for money, or whatever money could buy.[212] In a key sentence, he told them that, "You received without pay, give without pay".[213]

Francis undoubtedly had the best intentions when he set down his goal of poverty for himself and his brothers. But when he could find no explicit guidance in the Gospels for their day-to-day upkeep, he improvised.

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[207] *YouTube*, "FRANCIS OF ASSISI" (1:23:34).
[208] Money (Part 3): A warning from the past on page 221.
[209] Cunningham, *Brother Francis*, p. 103.
[210] Ibid, pp. 112-3.
[211] See for example Luke, 8:3.
[212] Luke, 10:7-8.
[213] Matthew, 10:8.

Francis may have succeeded in his personal ambition to emulate Christ but he could not impart his faith to the organisation he founded. One of Francis' biographers concluded, "the Franciscan order had been unfaithful to its origins".[214] Was a different outcome likely, or even possible? As a Church official states in the film, "In this world we have to be reasonable or fail".[215]

Are we too destined to fail? Or can we yet discover how to step off the "ruler of this world's" financial treadmill, and learn to thrive and be happy in a world without money?

[214] Quoted in Cunningham, *Brother Francis*, p. 6.
[215] *YouTube*, "FRANCIS OF ASSISI" (46:45).

II. History in the Making

11th March 2021 – 10th December 2022

ORIGINAL INTRODUCTION TO *HISTORY IN THE MAKING*

The title *History in the Making* reflects the extraordinary times in which we now live, as we enter the third decade of the 21st century. We are at a significant point in global history, at least as ground-breaking as the Reformation or the discovery of America.

Of course the importance of these historical milestones became apparent only with the passage of time. It is virtually impossible to view a drama unfolding before our eyes with anything like the same perspective or detachment.

Nevertheless that is my own instinctive response to what is going on today in Ireland and around the world. In fact the word 'extraordinary' seems wholly inadequate to describe it.

In *History in the Making* I address a fundamental question: how and why did we get here?

When I studied history in college I and my fellow-students were required to base our analyses and arguments on solid, verifiable evidence. Usually this meant some kind of documentary source to be found in a library, archive, or online. Occasionally archaeological evidence - a ruined castle or some other found artefact - would do. As long as the source had some kind of physical reality, then it was fine.

But as my studies progressed it became clear that there are many gaps in the historical record. For instance, the only evidence for the experience of those accused of witchcraft in the late Middle Ages is often the records created by their enemies, i.e. the legal establishment. Hardly an impartial source for anyone hoping to explore the topic comprehensively.

So the temptation for students and academics is to follow the sources rather than the subjects. Why waste a lot of time searching for evidence that might not exist when there are plenty of other well-trodden paths to follow? Unfortunately this means short shrift for groups such as native Americans, 18th-century Irish Catholic peasants, and medieval women, to name but three examples from history's blind spots.

In this series, thankfully, I am not obliged to follow academic convention. At the same time I do not cast aside the scholarly rigour I learnt during my studies. Evidence, however circumstantial or indirect, is important to any position I take. But sometimes it is necessary to step outside the evidentiary record in order to illuminate a topic that would otherwise remain hidden.

DIVIDED NATION: IRELAND IN 2021

First published: 11 March 2021

On the surface we in this country are a united people. Everyone from the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) to an ordinary Joe Soap like me shares a belief that Ireland currently faces an unprecedented and dangerous threat.

But what is the nature of that threat? Here is where a chasm opens up, dividing families, friends, neighbours, and colleagues from each other. One group of citizens, led by government and media, believes the danger lies in:

> the immediate, exceptional and manifest risk posed to human life and public health by the spread of Covid-19.[1]

This phrase appears in the preamble to a plethora of Statutory Instruments issued by the Minister of Health over the course of the last year. These orders specify in fine detail the formerly routine activities now restricted or forbidden to the Irish people.

Another section of the population perceives the threat very differently. For them it is an assault on the rights and liberties they once enjoyed as free citizens of a sovereign republic. Whether they believe Covid-19 to be a potentially harmful virus or not, people in this category object to what they see as the disproportionate and unprecedented measures imposed by government to counteract it.

I am in the second group. My stance is based on numerous anomalies and contradictions that make little or no sense to me. Here are a few that come to mind.

Face masks

During the first few months of the government's response to Covid-19, face coverings or masks were not deemed to be an essential means of combating infection. In fact some media pundits, such as Dr Luke O'Neill, implied that they could do more harm than good.

Then in July 2020 - months after deaths attributed to Covid-19 had peaked - the wearing of a face covering was made compulsory on public transport and in certain indoor settings, like shops. No new scientific evidence was advanced in support of this measure. Nor were regulations put in place to define exactly what constituted a face covering, or how it should be worn for best protection. As the order issued by the minister put it:

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[1] 'Statutory Instruments related to the COVID-19 pandemic', (https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/1f150-view-statutory-instruments-related-to-the-covid-19-pandemic/) 10 Mar 2021.

> "face covering" means a covering of any type which when worn by a person covers the person's nose and mouth.[2]

During the winter of 2020/21 the range of settings where face masks are required was expanded and the deadline for expiry of the mandate extended to June 2021. Again, no scientific evidence was presented vindicating the original order, or justifying the extensions. It seems that, for its own reasons, the Irish government is determined to make citizens wear face masks.

On that basis alone the campaign has been a huge success. Compliance with the face mask mandate is practically universal. Many now wear some kind of face covering even when they are not legally obliged to do so. A few even wear more than one outdoors.

Is it because they are genuinely scared of infection and believe a mask will protect them? Or have they become so befuddled by the ever-changing regulations that they opt for what they think is the safest course, i.e. wear a mask all the time – just in case?

Fatality rates

In early July 2020, *The Irish Times* covered the publication of a report by the Health Information and Quality Authority (Hiqa). The tenor of the report was reflected in the headline:

> Ireland's official coronavirus death toll likely to have been overstated, report finds.[3]

In a tweet sent just after the *Times* article was published, former Taoiseach, now-Tánaiste (Deputy PM), Leo Varadkar, confirmed this key message:

> Interesting but not a surprise. In Ireland we counted all deaths, in all settings, suspected cases even when no lab test was done, and included people with underlying terminal illnesses who died with Covid but not of it.[4]

Why would the impact of Covid-19 need to be exaggerated? And why was Varadkar's admission not made the subject of parliamentary or media scrutiny?

Although final numbers of registered fatalities for 2020 are not yet available, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) has published data for the first two quarters of the year. When compared with equivalent figures for each of the previous five years an interesting picture emerges.

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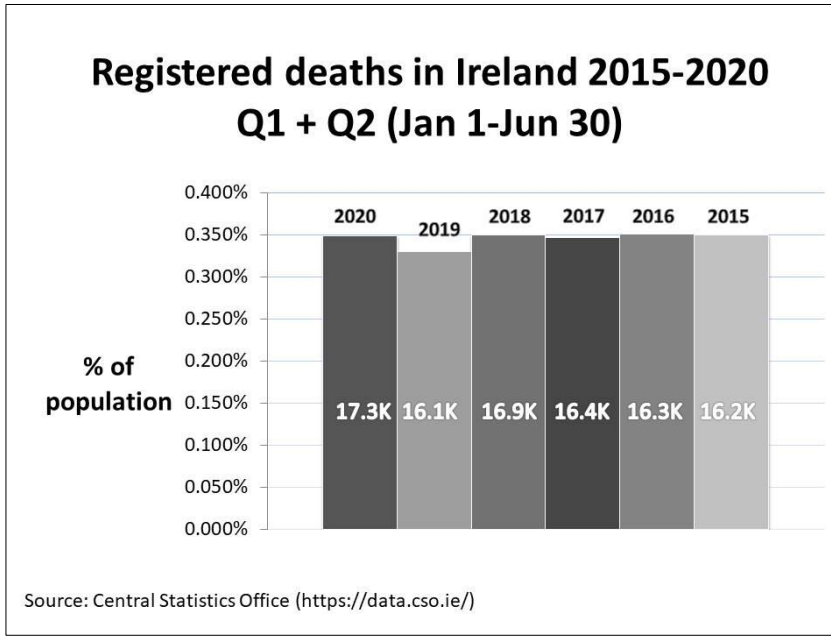
[2] In SI 571 issued on 4 Dec. 2020, this definition was altered to '"face covering" means a covering of any type which when worn by a person covers, without leaving a visible gap, the person's nose and mouth.' The additional clause was presumably inserted in order to stop people wearing transparent visors. Otherwise no further regulations were issued.

[3] *Irish Times*, 3 Jul 2020.

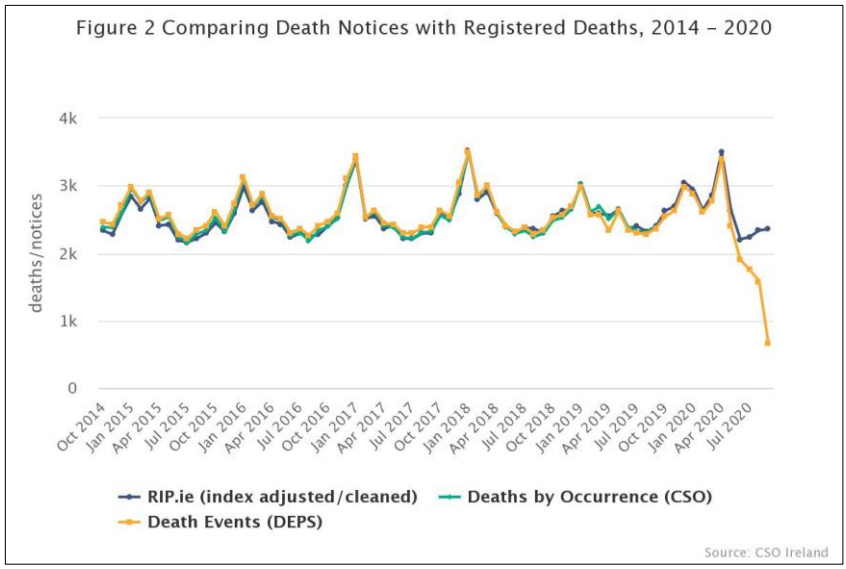
[4] Varadkar, Leo (2020), 'Interesting but not a surprise.' *Twitter*. 10:13am, 3 Jul. 2020. @LeoVaradkar



While the absolute number of deaths has risen during the period, so too has the overall population - in both cases by about 7%. The resulting death rate, therefore, has stayed pretty much the same at about 0.35%.

The CSO has yet to publish data on registered deaths for the second half of the year. So it remains to be seen whether or not the fatality rate for 2020 as a whole is consistent with that of previous years. However other evidence suggests that there was *no* change.

In an attempt to provide up-to-date mortality data, the CSO has turned to a new data source, www.RIP.ie. The CSO found that historical figures from the death notices web site show a "strong correlation" with the official data. This is evident from the following chart:



The CSO analysis demonstrates that the www.RIP.ie figures, on their own, provide a reliable proxy until official statistics become available. According to the CSO

> The number of death notices decreased in May and June (to 2,639 and 2,205 respectively) and has begun to rise slowly between July and September 2020 *in line with the trends seen in previous years*.[5]

So if no excess deaths are evident in the third quarter of 2020, could there have been a spike in quarter 4 that might bump up the overall rate for the year? Just before Christmas, in an interview on RTE Television, Leo Varadkar stated:

> Let's bear in mind that this winter in Ireland has seen *no excess deaths*. Yes, sadly, there have been people who have died from Covid. But no more people have died this winter than any comparable winter for the past 5 years...[6]

While we await official data for 2020 as a whole, these 'straws in the wind' suggest that the overall fatality rate for the year is not unusual. Does this evidence suggest we are dealing with a virus that poses an 'exceptional and manifest risk…to human life and public health'? Indeed is it possible

[5] 'Measuring Mortality Using Public Data Sources 2019-2020', *CSO* (https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/fb/b-mpds/measuringmortalityusingpublicdatasources2019-2020/) 10 Mar 2021. (emphasis added.) The spike in deaths for Apr 2020 is similar to the pattern seen during previous flu seasons, but earlier in the year, e.g. Jan 2017 and Jan 2018. The Hiqa report theorised that the spike in Apr 2020 reflects an acceleration in the deaths of vulnerable people, due to either Covid-19 or other ailments left untreated because of the focus on the pandemic. (*Irish Times*, 3 Jul 2020)

[6] Interview with Leo Varadkar, *Prime Time*, 17 Dec 2020. (emphasis added)

that the pandemic is not actually real?

A test?

At the beginning of March 2020 astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson appeared on CBS' *The Late Show*, hosted by Stephen Colbert. Tyson has gained considerable fame in the United States as a populariser of science on radio and TV – an American version of the UK's Brian Cox if you will. Colbert asked Tyson about the "coronavirus", news of which was then entering the public sphere. His guest's reply was telling.

> I think we're in the middle of a massive experiment worldwide…The experiment is: will people listen to scientists?[7]

Could Tyson's comment about a "massive experiment" relate to a document published in 2019 by the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board of the United Nations? Entitled *A World at Risk: Annual report on global preparedness for health emergencies*, the report sets out the tasks to be undertaken by governments and other agencies "to prepare for and mitigate the effects of global health emergencies".[8] Several "progress indicators" are listed, including this one:

> The United Nations (including WHO) conducts at least two system-wide training and *simulation exercises*, including one for covering the deliberate release of a lethal respiratory pathogen.[9]

A deadline to complete these tasks is also specified in the report. It is September 2020.

Of course neither the Colbert interview nor the UN report amounts to a 'smoking gun'. Anyway, the idea that the world is going through a UN/WHO "simulation exercise" is surely ridiculous.

Or is it?

During the last 12 months governments around the globe have simultaneously turned their countries into open prisons in an unprecedented clampdown on society. If the restrictions on personal freedom are not aimed at curbing the spread of a deadly pathogen - and the evidence presented here indicates they are not - what *is* their purpose?

Ireland: past, present and future

In the past Ireland has been riven by religious and political division. In the early-1920s, a civil war pitted former comrades against each other in a conflict over the terms of Irish independence. Before and after that independence was gained, differences between Catholics and Protestants sometimes erupted into violent conflict. But mostly they simmered below the surface when the two religious groups kept their distance from each

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[7] 'Neil deGrasse Tyson On Coronavirus: Will People Listen To Science?', *YouTube*, 7 Mar 2020.

[8] https://apps.who.int/gpmb/assets/annual_report/GPMB_annualreport_2019.pdf, 10 Mar 2021.

[9] Ibid (emphasis added).

other.

These historic divisions had one thing in common. A true or false position could never be determined between them. No one could *prove* that being Protestant or Republican was 'correct'. It was a matter of conviction. That is not the case here.

The societal division resulting from the pandemic, and the official response, is not amenable to a compromise like the Good Friday agreement or the Fianna Fáil/Fine Gael coalition. Either we are being deceived or we're not. There is no middle ground. Only one side of this division can be the correct one.

So how can Ireland recover whatever sense of national community we once enjoyed? Irrespective of how the current crisis ends, can anyone imagine a painless resumption of our old way of life?

I am reminded of something James Fintan Lalor wrote in 1847 during the Great Famine:

> To the past we can never return, even if we would.[10]

Perhaps we should focus on the future instead.

[10] James Fintan Lalor, *"The Faith of a Felon" and other writings*, ed. Marta Ramón (Dublin, 2012), p. 64.

THE "APPALLING VISTA": WHEN CONSPIRACY THEORIES COME TRUE

First published: 27 March 2021

The threat of Covid-19 has been hyped up - or worse. In other words we are being deceived.

Anyone who accepts this is immediately led to an unavoidable conclusion. Deception of the public on such an enormous scale could not happen without the collusion and support of a considerable number of people. It would have to involve a conspiracy. Here is a dictionary definition:

> conspiracy *n.* a secret plan by a group to do something unlawful or harmful.[11]

No one would dispute that surely? But the word 'conspiracy' becomes loaded when followed by its frequent companion, 'theory'. When the phrase 'conspiracy theory' appears in the media it is usually associated with some claim or belief that the author deems to be so outlandish that no counter-argument is needed to dismiss it. But occasionally "a secret plan" is exposed to public gaze and what was once derided as a 'conspiracy theory' is found not to have been so preposterous after all.

Film-maker Michael Moore expressed this more pithily than I could:

> Now, I'm not into conspiracy theories, except the ones that are true.[12]

There's the rub. How do we know where the truth lies? For every conspiracy revealed for what it is, like the Reichstag fire in Nazi Germany or the Iran-Contra affair in the USA, how many others are never uncovered?

But the point to remember is that conspiracies happen. And we don't have to move too far from these shores to find other examples.

The Birmingham Six

In 1975, six men were tried for the murder of 21 people. The victims were killed when two pubs were bombed in the English city of Birmingham in 1974. During the trial the presiding judge spelt out for the jury what it would mean if they found that the defendants were telling the truth about their innocence.

> Consider the scale of the conspiracy of those involved, it ranges does it not, from detective constables and police constables right up through the police hierarchy…Consider, lastly, the subtle artistry that has gone into the preparation of these statements, if indeed they are works of fiction. If the evidence of the defendants is true, it shows the police not only to be masters of the vile techniques of cruelty and brutality to suspects. It shows them to have a lively and inventive imagination.[13]

As two law professors pointed out, the judge's remarks turned out to be

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[11] *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (12th ed., Oxford, 2011).

[12] Michael Moore, *Dude, Where's My Country?* (New York, 2003), p. 2.

[13] Mike McConville & Luke Marsh, *The Myth of Judicial Independence* (Oxford 2020), p. 146.

an accurate description "of what the police *actually did*".[14] In their verdict on the final appeal made in 1991 by the Birmingham Six, the three judges concluded that:

> the police evidence at the trial [is] so unreliable, that…we would say that the convictions are both unsafe and unsatisfactory.[15]

When he delivered his verdict on an earlier, unsuccessful appeal by the Birmingham Six, Lord Alfred Denning described the prospect that the men were telling the truth as an "appalling vista". He feared the very outcome that emerged a decade later.

The idea that some things are best left hidden prevents many people from exploring uncomfortable questions because the answers may overturn their world. In Denning's case, the "appalling vista" was the prospect of the legal system to which he had devoted his life being brought into disrepute.[16]

DIRT Enquiry

In 1986, the Irish government introduced a new Deposit Interest Retention Tax (DIRT). The measure obliged financial institutions to deduct tax from any interest paid to customers on their savings accounts. This hit large depositors hard, especially during an era of high interest rates. So retail banks offered their customers a means of avoiding the new tax. This was based on a loophole that allowed non-residents of Ireland to receive the gross interest without deduction of the tax. So all a customer had to do was sign a form declaring that he/she lived outside the jurisdiction, give it to their bank, and they were off the hook.

In 1999 a parliamentary committee conducted an enquiry into the scheme. In their report they described it as a "very major scandal" that resulted in "widespread tax fraud".[17] The report went on:

> Discoveries were made of bank officials organising the opening and operation of bogus non-resident accounts for customers.[18]

The fraud was not simply the result of an illegal compact between banks and their customers. It involved those arms of state, like the Revenue Commissioners, that should have been preventing such fraud in the first place.[19] In a telling passage, the committee found that:

> During the relevant period the administrative state knew of the DIRT problem, knew of bogus non-resident accounts and knew that these phe-

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[14] Ibid (emphasis in original).
[15] 'England and Wales Court of Appeal (Criminal Division) Decisions', 27 Mar. 1991, *British and Irish Legal Information Institute*
[http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWCA/Crim/1991/2.html], 23 Mar. 2021.
[16] Catherine Elliott, Frances Quinn, *English Legal System* (8th ed., Harlow, 2007), p. 157.
[17] Committee of Public Accounts, *Parliamentary Enquiry into D.I.R.T. - Final Report* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 3, 59.
[18] Ibid, p. 4.
[19] Ibid, p. 87.

> nomena were in a context of more generalised tax evasion… Officials developed a concern to not "rock the boat".[20]

Being a political body, the report's authors used mild language to describe what they found. So they preferred phrases such as "connivance with illegality", rather than the more obvious c-word. But one newspaper was not so reticent. In its coverage of the public hearings that led up to the report, the paper quoted Dermot Gleeson, counsel for AIB Bank, in his cross-examination of a government tax official. This official, Tony MacCarthaigh, had been investigating the DIRT scandal. Gleeson attempted to confound the witness by referring to his "utterly absurd conspiracy theory" that AIB was engaging in illegal activity.[21]

But the committee found that it was neither "absurd" nor a "theory". They had uncovered a conspiracy involving powerful banks (not just AIB), wealthy people and government agencies, a conspiracy designed to defraud the state of revenues that could have been used to fund hospitals, schools, and other much-needed amenities.

In these examples, two types of conspirator can be discerned. There are the perpetrators directly involved, whether police officers or bank officials. Their reasons may have more to do with advancing their careers rather than lining their pockets. But they are hardly honourable. And then there are those, probably greater in number, who learn about the conspiracy and try to cover it up. Their motives may be good ones, but they are still colluding with corruption.

Lord Denning believed it was preferable for innocent men to go to prison than to have public confidence in the legal system undermined. Those in Ireland charged with safeguarding the integrity of the banking system thought it better to overlook tax evasion if it meant that the wealthy did not take their money abroad. Both were wrong.

When conspiracies like these are exposed, as some inevitably are, public confidence is corroded and cynicism spreads through society. So it is easy to see why many well-intentioned people allow themselves to become part of a cover-up, to prevent that "appalling vista" becoming a reality. But it is still wrong.

Is that what is happening with Covid-19? A scam being sustained by well-intentioned people not involved in its creation? Do they implicate themselves in deception because they believe that to allow the truth to come out would only make things worse?

Perhaps. But what about the perpetrators? Why are they trying to hoodwink us? Are their intentions good, or are they motivated by base desires? If they are practising sleight of hand in order to distract us, what is it they don't want us to see?

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[20] Ibid, p. 10.

[21] *Evening Herald*, 12 Oct. 1999.

Since the WHO elevated Covid-19 to a global pandemic in March 2020, the Internet has been awash with alternative theories about what is really going on. Many of these theories presuppose the existence of a contagious and deadly virus. The differences between them relate either to how it originated, e.g. in a Chinese laboratory, as a side-effect of the 5G rollout, or its 'true' purpose, e.g. to reduce the world's population.

However, if the threat posed by Covid-19 is either inconsequential or non-existent, then we should look elsewhere to find the truth. That will be the focus of my next post.

GREEN OR GOLD? (PART 1): THE "GOLD" AGENDA

First published: 02 April 2021

In challenging the official Covid-19 narrative, sceptics like me face a daunting obstacle. We may highlight anomalies, contradictions, and downright absurdities in the actions taken by government, its allies, and associates. But unless we also come up with an alternative explanation that fits the facts better than the official narrative, the latter will remain the default position of most people.

As I mentioned last time, there are many theories floating around as to what the real agenda behind the pandemic is. For me, two stand out from the rest and I discuss the first here. I like them both because the proponents make their respective cases logically and fluently. I don't know either person so my judgement is not based on the characters or possible motives of the individuals involved. For me, it is the arguments themselves that count.

That is not to suggest that I am personally convinced by either theory. I simply present what I hope are fair synopses of each case in the belief that they offer credible alternatives to the official narrative, and are worthy therefore of consideration by the fair-minded reader.

Simon Elmer lives in London and is an architect and a socialist. He and his colleagues practise under the name Architects for Social Housing (ASH). They are trying to develop what they call a "socialist architecture" that focuses on the needs of people and their communities, one that offers an alternative to the forces of what they see as the predominant, capitalist market. Over the last year, however, architecture has taken a back seat as their focus shifts to the pandemic and its consequences. During that time, Simon Elmer has become one of the most persistent and erudite critics in Britain of the official Covid-19 narrative.

On March 18 2020, Elmer published his first online piece on the subject. In it he condemned the fear-mongering and heavy-handedness of the British authorities, already evident to him in their response to the crisis. He could also see the hype behind the message.

> By grossly exaggerating the threat of coronavirus and COVID-19 to the health of the population, the Government and its state apparatuses are laying the groundwork to pass on the financial burden of lost revenue to the same people who paid for the financial crisis of 2007-08.[22]

Since then he has produced numerous online articles in which he analyses the implications of government actions for all of us. In total, Elmer's writings on Covid-19 amount to over 200,000 words, or the equivalent of a hefty book. Naturally Elmer's focus is on Britain. But I believe that his

[22] "Covid-19 and Capitalism", 18 Mar. 2020, *Architects for Social Housing* [https://architectsforsocialhousing.co.uk/2020/03/18/covid-19-and-capitalism/], 27 Mar. 2021.

analyses and arguments are just as relevant to Ireland. Elmer's thesis can be summed up in an extract from his paper published in July 2020.

> The world of parliamentary democracies, of civil liberties and human rights, including our rights of assembly, speech, thought, privacy and a fair trial, of the division of powers between an executive, legislature and judiciary, of media scrutiny of Government, of freedom from censorship, of political activity itself, is now over.[23]

According to Elmer, the elements necessary to make such a top-down revolution work are now falling into place. These are: "the legislation necessary to administer it, the technology required to police it, and the manufacture of popular consent to its implementation."[24] Up to now I doubt if it has ever been possible to bring all three ingredients together in the service of state power over its citizenry. Would-be dictators like Louis XIV could dream about imposing his will on the state. However without modern communications or technology his dream remained just that.

But is the pandemic simply an excuse for government to fulfil the goal of dictators throughout history? Power for its own sake? Elmer's most recent piece attempts to address the $64,000 question (or questions):

> Why is this being done, and to what end? Of what benefit, and to whose benefit, is the impoverishment of the population of the UK and of most other Western liberal democracies around the world? Why would the governments of capitalist economies deliberately set out to bankrupt millions of small businesses and drive tens of millions of workers into unemployment and destitution?[25]

Elmer rejects what he asserts is the *only* de facto alternative to the official narrative, i.e. that "the whole thing has been manufactured by a conspiracy of powerful individuals and organisations". He takes this position because – in his view – the concept of a "conspiracy theory" automatically implies that a small group of powerful individuals can manipulate the people at will - and the people are helpless to resist. So, as Elmer sees it, anyone who accepts the conspiratorial view of history is admitting their own impotence in the face of elite tyranny.

I disagree. My stance on this issue is captured by the Michael Moore quip I quoted in my last post.[26] However Elmer's position is more subtle and, dare I say it, more convoluted. He suggests that his model of "conspiracy theory", i.e. the omniscient few imposing their will on a helpless

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[23] "The New Normal: What is the UK Biosecurity State? (Part 1. Programmes and Regulations)", 31 Jul. 2020, *Architects for Social Housing* [https://architectsforsocialhousing.co.uk/2020/07/31/the-new-normal-what-is-the-uk-biosecurity-state-part-1-programmes-and-regulations/], 29 Mar. 2021.

[24] Ibid.

[25] "Cui Bono? The COVID-19 'Conspiracy'", 19 Feb. 2021, *Architects for Social Housing* [https://architectsforsocialhousing.co.uk/2021/02/19/cui-bono-the-covid-19-conspiracy/], 29 Mar. 2021.

[26] The "appalling vista": When conspiracy theories come true on page 131.

populace, has become - for a lot of people - the acceptable alternative explanation of otherwise puzzling events and developments in today's world.

> In a choice between being told that we are flies to the wanton boys running the world and blank incomprehension at the vast and terrifying complexity of that world, it seems we overwhelmingly prefer the first story for our evening's television.[27]

There is some truth in this analysis. But it overlooks the reality that, irrespective of popular perceptions or cultural preferences, conspiracies *do* occur. We know this because of those cases where a conspiracy and the conspirators involved have been exposed.

So if we are neither "facing a civilisation-threatening virus" nor being played by a "conspiracy of powerful individuals and organisations", what is Simon Elmer's hypothesis? Frankly, it's another conspiracy – although Elmer has a different word for it.

> We all know its name, and despite all the renewed predictions of its death it hasn't gone away. On the contrary, it's just going through a revolution — perhaps one worthy of a new prefix — but its name is still the same. Capitalism.[28]

For Simon Elmer, Capitalism is not the result of a conspiracy by the superrich and their associates. It is an "abstract force" now tightening its control over our economic system. He argues that there is no single author of change, not in the world of international markets. There are only the effects of millions of actions and transactions of vastly different sizes and influence which, when they converge with sufficient focus and force on a moment in time and place, bring about a revolution.[7]

Elmer then goes on to itemise the myriad ways in which capitalists, in conjunction with government, are exploiting the opportunities opened up by the 'new normal' and finding new ways to make money out of it. One of the many examples he cites are the "newly launched pharmacies run by banks to deliver repeat prescriptions to our door safely together with 'a reminder of when to take our medicine'".[29]

But Elmer cannot completely avoid the 'elephant in the room'. He muses on the links between Klaus Schwab's World Economic Forum on the one hand and a plethora of commercial behemoths such as Goldman Sachs, Facebook, and Pfizer on the other. He explains the evident global co-ordination throughout the Covid-19 crisis as a result of "collaboration" between governments - just that. He alludes to a speech back in 2017 by Matt Hancock, then UK Minister for Digital and Culture, now the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, in which this politician seemed to pre-

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[27] "Cui Bono? The COVID-19 'Conspiracy'".
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.

dict the very changes in society now coming about as a result of the crisis.

Yet Simon Elmer insists that what is unfolding in Britain, Ireland and many other countries, is not a conspiracy of vested interests creating an environment in which they can more easily line their pockets. He sees it rather as an evolution or mutation of Capitalism into a new form that will produce:

> an even wealthier and even more powerful ruling class, freed of the shackles of scrutiny and accountability.[30]

And yes, it's true. If we include in that class the likes of Jeff Bezos, founder and CEO of Amazon, and Albert Bourla, head of Pfizer, then Covid-19 is the gift that keeps on giving.

In the first four months of 2020, Bezos' fortune grew by $24bn.[31] Given that many retail stores have been closed for the last year, his personal income can only have mushroomed as people are forced to shop at online providers like Amazon.

In 2021 alone, Pfizer's new vaccine is expected to generate revenues of €12.5bn for the company. But it won't stop there. Dr. Bourla expects that, because of the need for boosters and new formulations to deal with virus variants, the vaccine will provide a "durable" revenue stream into the future.[32]

Undoubtedly Simon Elmer is correct in his argument that the Covid-19 crisis has provided a golden opportunity for big business. But that opportunity could not have arisen without the actions of government and the support of the media. As one British newspaper reported recently, the government there has indemnified Pfizer against any legal action arising after its vaccine is administered.

> Ministers have also changed the law in recent weeks to give new protections to companies such as Pfizer, giving them immunity from being sued by patients in the event of any complications.[33]

Perhaps Elmer realises that his focus on Capitalism as the culprit does not quite explain such an alignment of politics, business, and media interests. At the end of his most recent article he softens his opposition to a conspiratorial dimension concluding that "whether [it] is a conspiracy or opportunism ultimately doesn't matter to the ends to which it is being directed".[34]

And, if Elmer is reading the signs accurately, those ends are nothing less than "a technological totalitarianism which…will make those of the Twentieth Century look like crude prototypes in comparison".[35] He may

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[30] Ibid.
[31] *Guardian*, 15 Apr. 2020.
[32] *Irish Times*, 2 Feb. 2021.
[33] *Independent*, 2 Dec. 2020.
[34] "Cui Bono? The COVID-19 'Conspiracy'".
[35] Ibid.

be blinkered by his adherence to an artificial left/right dichotomy, but Simon Elmer has surely identified one of the key drivers of the Covid-19 crisis: the lure of gold.

GREEN OR GOLD? (PART 2): THE "GREEN" AGENDA

First published: 03 April 2021

During the spring of 2020, shortly after the imposition of strict limits on personal movement, I noticed a huge improvement in our local environment. Most cars and lorries were off the road and the constant background hum caused by moving traffic was replaced by something novel, and wonderful: the sound of silence!

The sky seemed bluer, the sea was clearer. Everything felt fresh and pure. For those few weeks we seemed to have returned to a pre-industrial age before pollution degraded our world. If this was an unexpected side effect of the severe quarantine measures that seemed to come out of nowhere, it was one I definitely welcomed.

But what if that was the intention all along - not only in Ireland but right across the planet? Were we experiencing the planned ending of one kind of society in order that another could begin?

That is the premise behind the theory promulgated by Kevin Galalae. It is based on his claim that the pandemic is a hoax devised by the United Nations and world governments. According to Galalae, their goal is to tackle three fundamental problems that threaten the very basis of our civilisation:

> over-consumption, which is the disease of the developed world; over-population, which is the disease of the developing world; and over-abuse, which is the combined effect of overconsumption and overpopulation on the planet and its life-support systems.[36]

These issues have been discussed for a long time. A UN report published in 1987 presented the problem in this way:

> The Earth is one but the world is not. We all depend on one biosphere for sustaining our lives. Yet each community, each country, strives for survival and prosperity with little regard for its impact on others. Some consume the Earth's resources at a rate that would leave little for future generations. Others, many more in number, consume far too little and live with the prospect of hunger, squalor, disease, and early death.[37]

Those "some", of course, are citizens of the prosperous West. As the report argues:

> An additional person in an industrial country consumes far more and places far greater pressure on natural resources than an additional person

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[36] Kevin Galalae, 'The Pandemic Illusion and Global Governance', 10 Jun. 2020, downloaded from [https://independent.academia.edu/KevinMugurGalalae], 31 Mar. 2021.

[37] *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future* (1987).

> in the Third World.[38]

However, as the report also asserts, people in the Third World are reproducing much faster than their western counterparts.

> The greater part of global population increase will take place in developing countries, where the 1985 population of 3.7 billion may increase to 6.8 billion by 2025.[39]

So if people in the West keep buying stuff like there is no tomorrow, and those in the Third World carry on procreating like there is no tomorrow, the UN insists that there *will* be no tomorrow! Or as the report puts it:

> There are thresholds that cannot be crossed without endangering the basic integrity of the system. Today we are close to many of these thresholds; we must be ever mindful of the risk of endangering the survival of life on Earth.[40]

How could such a conundrum be resolved? And who or what could possibly succeed in doing just that?

Because this is a global problem, the report suggests that only a global organisation could lead the world towards "sustainable development". As the report argues, there is only one "intergovernmental organization with universal membership" that could take on this task. Given its authorship, it is not surprising that the United Nations identified itself as the obvious candidate for such a role.[41]

The UN report was published more than three decades ago. Since then, many diverse projects and initiatives have set out to bring the critical state of the environment to political and public attention. At first these were pretty sober and sedate, like the Kyoto Protocol and the rise of Green politics. However recently things have become more strident, prime examples being the activities of Extinction Rebellion and Greta Thunberg.

In January 2021, Thunberg addressed via video link the 1,700 virtual participants of the annual World Economic Forum, usually held in Davos, Switzerland. According to Ms Thunberg, things could hardly be worse.

> The climate and ecological crisis can unfortunately no longer be solved within today's systems. According to the current best available science that is no longer an opinion; that's a fact.[42]

Back in 1987 the authors of the UN report (or maybe just a few of them) anticipated that the threats they identified could not be resolved by the usual remedy of multilateral deal-making and international treaties. Tucked away in a corner of the 300-page document is this insight.

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[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] *World Economic Forum* [https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/01/greta-thunberg-message-to-the-davos-agenda/], 31 Mar. 2021.

> All would be better off if each person took into account the effect of his or her acts upon others. But each is unwilling to assume that others will behave in this socially desirable fashion, and hence all continue to pursue narrow self-interest.[43]

Maybe this explains Greta Thunberg's recent apocalyptic announcement – and Kevin Galalae's theory.

Galalae hints that he is more than a disinterested observer and analyst, that he is in fact a former insider whose warnings were ignored by his associates. Or he may be just a fantasist. But his case stands or falls on its own merits. The reader can decide for him or herself.

In both written and video essays produced during the summer of 2020, Galalae contends that the UN decided that the planet could not be saved through the voluntary actions of its peoples. As he puts it:

> Political and scientific leaders, in their desperation, decided to act.[44]

The plan outlined by Galalae would have had to be in the works for several years at least, given that it must have included the advent of Greta Thunberg. In any event, Galalae argues that each element of the governmental response specifically addresses one or more of the three existential threats he (and the UN report) describes. For instance,

1. Closing down most retail outlets, restaurants, theatres, etc., curbed impulse spending drastically. Social distancing and mandatory face masks were imposed to make even shopping for so-called essentials less attractive for citizens.
2. A combination of reducing or cancelling vital non-Covid health treatments, plus the promotion of "cocooning", have hit older citizens in the developed world particularly hard. The aim was and is to reduce the West's "old-age burden" by "send[ing] the old and the ill faster and in greater numbers into their graves". Meanwhile a depopulation programme for the Third World is being considered (as of June 2020) using various measures, including mandatory vaccines.
3. The lockdown of societies, the creation of a climate of fear throughout the world, and promoting the Chinese approach to civil control, are all calculated, according to Galalae, "to bring the global economy to a standstill so as to reduce consumption and greenhouse gas emissions".

Whatever the true goal, it's not just me who noticed the dramatic changes. According to a recent news item:

> The pandemic helped push American emissions below 1990 levels for the first time. Globally, carbon dioxide emissions fell 7 percent, or 2.6 billion metric tons, according to new data from international climate researchers.

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[43] *Our Common Future*

[44] 'The Pandemic Illusion and Global Governance'.

> In terms of output, that is about double the annual emissions of Japan.[45]

Recent scientific research from the US found that

> the environment is quickly changing, and the timing of those changes seems to indicate that the pandemic may be a reason. Deforestation rates are changing in some places, air pollution is diminishing, water quality is improving, and snow is becoming more reflective in some areas since the pandemic began earlier this year.[46]

Kevin Galalae claims to be blowing the whistle on a secret plan to 'save the planet' because he does not agree with the methods being used. He maintains that the "Great Reset" cannot succeed in the long-term if it is built on a "foundation of lies".[47] By creating a fake pandemic, global authorities have taken a huge risk that will become manifest when the truth emerges, as he believes it will. That risk is the complete collapse of public confidence in all arms of the establishment, whether political, medical, media, or religious.

But Galalae himself would not have relied *solely* on telling the truth to the people. He argues that the UN and its affiliated governments should first have singled out the super-rich by outlawing their conspicuous consumption and confiscating their palaces, yachts, and aircraft. Then, perhaps ordinary people would have agreed to make the sacrifices necessary to tackle the environmental catastrophe he foresees ahead.

However, even under Kevin Galalae's strategy, coercion would become necessary if the people remained uncooperative, because as he also states in his video:

> "And if that fails, impose them [i.e. the sacrifices]."[48]

Indeed indefinite coercion seems likely, whether or not the current deception is exposed. According to one of the studies cited above

> Many of the environmental improvements that researchers are seeing won't last if the world goes back to its pre-pandemic ways.[49]

So, if Covid-19 really is a front for a 'Green Agenda', we cannot assume that the perpetrators are inclined to ever permit the world to return to the 'old normal'. But *is* Kevin Galalae's theory correct, or is the truth behind this pandemic to be found elsewhere? That will be the topic of my next post.

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[45] *New York Times*, 7 Mar. 2021.
[46] 'Environmental impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, as observed from space', *Science Daily*, 8 Dec. 2020
[https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/12/201208162957.htm], 2 Apr. 2021.
[47] Kevin Galalae, "Failures of the Plandemic Strategy".
[https://www.academia.edu/video/jY6eb1], 31 Mar. 2021.
[48] Ibid.
[49] 'Environmental impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic'.

THE RULER OF THIS WORLD: TIME TO GO?

First published: 03 April 2021

While on a family holiday in Cyprus almost 25 years ago, we made a short trip across the sea to Israel. As we went sight-seeing in Jerusalem, I found myself on the Via Dolorosa, the route taken by Jesus as he was led to his execution. I don't know if I was standing on the actual cobble stones he had walked on many centuries earlier. But in that moment it felt as if the grim procession had only just passed by.

It is difficult to explain, but I could somehow sense the passions that must have erupted across the city during those fateful days. They seemed to emanate from the ground beneath me like a kind of background radiation. I could detect the same primal emotion that was directed at Jesus all those centuries ago. An emotion so intense that traces of it remained in the ground itself. It was unmistakeable. It was hatred of him and everything he stood for.

Real though my experience in Jerusalem was, can I place it at the same level of authority as the established accounts of Jesus' life and death? But even the four Gospels, the only biographical records we have, would not be acceptable to academia as valid historical evidence. As one eminent scholar succinctly put it: "Their purpose was primarily didactic, not historical."[50] They deal with the biblical Jesus of the Christian faith and were written long after the events they purport to describe.

Nevertheless, although it can never be proven that the Gospels constitute a true historical record, I am inclined to follow the advice of another biblical scholar who suggests that we "show a greater trust" that the accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are not "random inventions", but reflect a sincere attempt to tell the world about a remarkable man and his teachings.[51] So if you the reader are prepared to suspend any disbelief in your mind for the next few minutes, off we go.

Several of the biblical narratives describe a strange event in Jesus' life just before he became a public figure. While fasting alone in a remote place he was approached by the devil himself. Satan attempted to sidetrack Jesus from the mission he was preparing to embark upon.

> And the devil took him up, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory; for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it shall all be yours." And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'"[52]

No doubt this story is meant to underline Jesus' ability to resist tempt-

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[50] Geza Vermes, *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus* (London, 2004), p. x.
[51] Sean Freyne, *Jesus, A Jewish Galilean* (London, 2004), pp. 3, 6.
[52] Luke, 4:5-8.

ation. But I draw another lesson from the reported encounter. This world is Satan's domain, not Jesus'. Emperors like Tiberius in Rome or Guangwu in China might have imagined they ruled in their own lands. But it seems that Satan could dispose of their kingdoms without a thought if it meant getting Jesus under his thumb.

If Satan was in charge of our world when he tried to bribe Jesus, did he remain so after their encounter in the desert? Towards the end of his life, Jesus referred to his erstwhile tempter as still being around at least.

> I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me.[53]

The extent to which Jesus was impervious, even indifferent, to Satan's power plays is illustrated by a story from his public life. One day he and his disciples were travelling by boat across the Sea of Galilee. During the crossing Jesus fell into a sleep so sound that he had to be roused by his followers when a violent storm threatened to overturn the craft. Jesus "rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm." He also rebuked his companions.

> Why are you afraid, O men of little faith?[54]

Perhaps he had already mentioned to his disciples his experience in the desert and expected them to understand that Satan is a 'paper tiger' who can do no harm to anyone who serves God. Or maybe they just needed to see it for themselves.

Going back to that encounter, Satan also tried to persuade Jesus to demonstrate his own power by calling on God's angels to come to his aid.[55] Jesus was not tempted but the episode shows that Satan knew who the *real* authority was - Jesus. Does this explain my experience in Jerusalem?

It is easy to understand why Satan would hate Jesus. The latter had failed to render due deference to Satan's position. Furthermore Jesus had shown others that they could easily defy and overcome his supposed authority. Yet afterwards, when Jesus had left, there can be no doubt that "the ruler of this world" continued as before.

In 2008 I returned to fulltime education as an undergraduate student. On my first day I attended an induction meeting at Trinity College Dublin. The speaker was Professor Ciaran Brady, then head of the Department of History where I was to study, and a brilliant rhetorician. What he said will stay with me for the rest of my days. He described the history we would learn during our time in Trinity as truly terrible. So appalling was the picture he painted that I began to wonder if I should not turn and leave the lecture hall immediately. But as he came to the end of his remarks he made an important distinction. History itself might be dreadful, but the

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[53] John, 14:30. Jesus made similar references at 12:31 and 16:11.
[54] Matthew, 8:23-7.
[55] Matthew, 4:5-7.

study of history was to be cherished.

And so it transpired. I thoroughly enjoyed my years as a student, but what I learnt about the human capacity for cruelty, injustice, and downright wickedness convinced me that, whatever this world is, it is not some benign precursor to Heaven. The litany of horrors seems endless: bloody battles over trifles, revolutions in which one tyrant was followed by another even more terrible than the last, peaceful peoples displaced or slaughtered by predatory land-grabbers, and so on *ad* bloody *infinitum*. If anything, matters became worse when we reached the most brutal period of all, the twentieth century, half of which I lived through.

Of course it was not all bad. History tends to ignore the ordinary folk who want nothing more than to live out their lives in harmony with the land, their families, and their neighbours. The problem is the few who crave control over the many: the would-be tyrants and despots who, but for the lack of means, would have long ago transformed our already bleak world into another Hell.

And behind them all was the true string-puller, the only puppet-master, "the ruler of this world". He does not care to whom or to what we pledge our allegiance or offer our support - as long as we pick only from the cards he offers.

- Capitalism or Communism
- Republican or Democrat
- Labour or Conservative
- Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael

As Satan signalled during his encounter with Jesus, they all ultimately serve him. Even if we think, "A plague on both your houses!" and have nothing to do with either option, he stays put. Even if we don't vote on election-day, the government still wins.

Yes "the ruler of this world" will continue where he is - as long as we do not consider the only choice worth making. A choice between good and evil - God or Satan. That is what we are now confronted with. Not a choice between virus and vaccine, or even Green and Gold as I outlined in a recent series.[56] But a decision about the sort of world we want for ourselves and for our children.

The choice is ours.

[56] Green or Gold? (Part 1): The "Gold" Agenda on page 135.

KING OF THE WORLD! HOW MANKIND LEAPT TO THE TOP OF THE EVOLUTIONARY TREE

First published: 17 April 2021

Recently as I gazed out my window I noticed a small flock of birds circling in the sky. "Bet they aren't worried about Covid-19", I thought to myself. I am sure the same could be said of the fox I heard howling in the field the other night. No, Covid-19 is a human preoccupation and our fellow creatures on this planet neither know nor care about it.

This set me thinking about the differences between mankind, *Homo sapiens*, us – and what we refer to as the 'animal kingdom', i.e. everything else that moves or crawls about. As far as I understand it – and I am not a scientist – we are all part of an evolutionary process which, if you go back far enough, leads us to a common ancestor. In other words we are all distant cousins, albeit very distant ones when you step outside our species.

Somewhere along the way we humans diverged from the rest of Creation. Having been part of the natural world for millennia, hunting and being hunted, our species took off on a different trajectory a long time ago. And the gap between *Homo sapiens* and other fauna has grown wider ever since.

Today we dominate the planet to an extent that no other species has or could. Even the most intelligent animals, such as orangutans or dolphins, don't come close to us. They continue to live in harmony with their environment and, as far as I can judge, they want only to be left alone to do so.

We humans, on the other hand, have appropriated the land and the seas and plunder their riches with ever-growing efficiency and ferocity. We act like a demented burglar who trashes the house into which he has broken, stealing anything not nailed down and shitting on the carpets. By the time he is finished there will be nothing left but a ruined shell.

But wasn't the supremacy of mankind over Creation ordained by God, at least according to Genesis, the first book of the Bible?

> Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."[57]

Even if we accept that the 'creation myth' in Genesis is not the literal truth about how the world and its inhabitants came into being, many people believe that humanity stands at the pinnacle of Creation because that's how God arranged things.

A secular view can be found in Yuval Noah Harari's 2014 best-seller, *Sapiens: A brief history of humankind*. In his book Harari tells the story of our species from its beginnings to the present day. He describes how the

[57] Genesis, 1:26.

process of evolution led us from the cave to our present era of dizzying technological advances. Central to Harari's case is his assertion that the history of humankind was punctuated by three 'revolutions', each of which altered the course of our development in a fundamental way. He identifies them as:

1. The Cognitive Revolution
2. The Agricultural Revolution
3. The Scientific Revolution

Before the first of these revolutions, our species had been one of several types of human and, according to Harari, was nothing special. But about 70,000 years ago something changed inside the brain of *Homo sapiens*. This Cognitive Revolution enabled us to gradually eliminate our human rivals, including Neanderthals, and to dominate the Earth. Mankind developed language and began to exhibit extraordinary creativity and invention, producing domestic tools, weaponry, and various modes of transport (which enabled us to spread across the globe). Harari attributes this leap in human development to a random event rather than some conscious external intervention.

> The most commonly believed theory argues that accidental genetic mutations changed the inner wiring of the brains of Sapiens, enabling them to think in unprecedented ways and to communicate using an altogether new type of language.[58]

I have written elsewhere about the similar idea that Stanley Kubrick outlined in his film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*.[59] However that movie attributed the fast-tracking of our evolution to the intervention of a superior alien intelligence.

Whatever the trigger, we presume our right to dominate all life on Earth. As Harari writes:

> Over the past 10,000 years, *Homo sapiens* has grown so accustomed to being the only human species that it's hard for us to conceive of any other possibility. Our lack of brothers and sisters makes it easier to imagine that we are the epitome of creation, and that a chasm separates us from the rest of the animal kingdom.[60]

This mental obstacle is real. When the UN expresses concern about our stewardship of the planet through a seemingly endless series of summit meetings, committees, and reports, one fundamental assumption is made - as the title of a recent document makes clear: *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

The UN sees the Earth as "*our* world". And "our" in this instance does not include all the other species with whom we share the planet, and it certainly does not include God. That much is plain from the seventeen

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[58] Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A brief history of humankind* (London, 2014), p. 23.
[59] Sapiens? on page 77.
[60] Ibid., p. 20.

"Sustainable Development Goals" delineated in the document. They are concerned with the fate of *Homo sapiens*. From the UN's perspective, the planet and its other inhabitants are important only insofar as we humans need them to maintain our 'exalted' position.[61]

To go back to my analogy, it is as if the burglar decided to conduct his raids in a less rapacious manner so that he and his successors can continue to rob the same house over and over again without actually destroying it. But is such a strategy feasible? Not if two recent documentaries, *Planet of the Humans* and *Seaspiracy*, are to be believed.

Each of these films depicts the horrors of 21st-century environmental exploitation in often graphic detail. The film-makers go beyond the official fixation on anthropogenic climate change as *the* ecological problem we should be worrying about. Instead they burrow down into the environmental movement itself to expose the extent to which it is controlled by big business. In doing so they reveal the UN strategy of sustainability to be at best an impossible goal or, at worst, a colossal scam. The conclusion voiced by writer/director Jeff Gibbs at the end of *Planet of the Humans* underlines the gravity of our current predicament.

> We humans must accept that infinite growth on a finite planet is suicide. We must accept that our human presence is far beyond sustainability, and all that that implies. We must take control of our environmental movement, and our future, from billionaires and their permanent war on planet earth. They are not our friends.[62]

The damage we are doing to ourselves and our environment is evident in other areas too. In 2019 alone total military expenditure across the planet was $1,917 billion.[63] That money was spent on guns, ammunition, and the various accoutrements of modern weaponry – all designed and sometimes used to slaughter human beings like us. The main beneficiaries of the international arms trade are the big manufacturers like the United States, China, India, Russia and Saudi Arabia. We benefit too. Without US investment in Ireland – totalling $444 billion according to one estimate – how could we continue to enjoy our comfortable lifestyles as part of the prosperous First World?[64]

It is not tigers or bumble bees who are causing this mayhem. It is us, *Homo sapiens*. And despite what the Bible suggests, it was hardly God who decreed this terrible state of affairs.

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[61] UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 25 Sep. 2015.
[62] The Planet of the Humans - FULL Documentary, *YouTube*, 28 Jun 2020.
[63] *reliefweb*, 'SIPRI Fact Sheet April 2020: Trends in world military expenditure, 2019', [https://reliefweb.int/report/world/sipri-fact-sheet-april-2020-trends-world-military-expenditure-2019], 16 Apr. 2021.
[64] *American Chamber of Commerce Ireland* [https://www.amcham.ie/About-Us/US-Companies-in-Ireland/Stats-Facts.aspx], 16 Apr. 2021.

According to an academic source, "the Bible is the most widely disseminated book in the world".[65] It may be the most misunderstood too. It is tempting to either consume it whole as the word of God transcribed by holy men, or reject it completely as a grotesque distortion of all that is good. Neither approach requires much critical thinking and both are wrong. If you accept this, then it is not difficult to see the biblical account of Creation as perhaps the most successful example of a phenomenon noted by George Orwell and others.

> History is written by the winners.[66]

There is no doubt in my mind that the Book of Genesis was written by the winners, i.e. *Homo sapiens*. How better for its writers to legitimise that victory than by presenting it as God's will? We think we are top of the heap but, as I argued in a previous post, it is really Satan who runs this world.[67] As his encounter with Jesus suggests, Satan uses plutocrats and politicians to carry out his bidding on Earth.

But is there more?

Whether through blind fate, ET, or something else, did Satan also ensure that mankind as a whole separated from the rest of Creation? Maybe it is a daft idea. What possible reason could "the ruler of this world" have for such a move? Well, look where we are today.

Now, in the uncertainty caused by a global crisis, there is an opportunity for *Homo sapiens* to change direction, to make a fresh start, to stop trusting our fate to someone who would lead us into Hell with a promise of Heaven.

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[65] Peter Calvocoressi, *Who's Who in the Bible* (2nd ed., London, 1990), p. xii.
[66] George Orwell, *The complete works of George Orwell* (20 vols, London, 1986), xvi, p. 89.
[67] The ruler of this world: Time to go? on page 143.

A Cleansing Fire

First published: 02 May 2021

In my last post I argued that mankind's position at the apex of Creation - however it came about - has been a disaster for us and for the planet. As I also wrote, "despite what the Bible suggests, it was not God who decreed this terrible state of affairs".[68]

If my hypothesis is correct, the Genesis story of mankind's origins must surely qualify as the 'mother of all' conspiracies, mustn't it?

The others I have discussed, like the Birmingham Six and DIRT Enquiry scandals, are small beer in comparison.[69] And the bigger international examples such as the Reichstag fire, the Iran-Contra affair – not to mention Covid-19 - diminish in comparison to the behemoth that is the lie about *Homo sapiens*.

Hard as it may be to swallow, there is an even bigger deception to be unravelled. That means taking another dive into "the world's best-selling and most widely distributed book", the Bible.[70]

For Christians and Jews, the Bible is a collection of sacred texts, the earliest of which date back to about 500 BC. The Bible is divided into two parts: Old Testament and New Testament. The Old Testament was written by many hands over hundreds of years, and is an account of the ancient Hebrews and their relationship with God. The New Testament centres on the life and early legacy of Jesus Christ and includes the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The status of the Bible as sacred scripture was underlined by Martin Luther when he described it as "God's Word and book".[71] But the Bible's impact on our world is not confined to the Judeo-Christian portion of humanity. The Bible has shaped global history and culture to an extent that would require several thick volumes to elucidate. However I think this brief evaluation expresses the point better than I could:

> If by some hideous accident at the divine computer keyboard the 'delete' key were pressed for the Bible, much of the content of Western culture would disappear and it would shrivel like a deflating balloon.[72]

For "Western culture" read "global culture". Through centuries of empire-building and colonisation, Europe, as the home of Western culture, exported to the world its values and customs creating what Yuval Harari asserts is "a single integrated human society".[73] Those values and customs were derived from biblical texts that proclaimed mankind to be the crowning

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[68] King of the world! How mankind leapt to the top of the evolutionary tree on page 146.
[69] The "appalling vista": When conspiracy theories come true on page 131.
[70] *Guinness World Records*, [https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/best-selling-book-of-non-fiction], 1 May 2021.
[71] Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, tr. William Hazlitt (Grand Rapids, MI., 2004), p. 17.
[72] David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its history and influence* (New Haven, 2003), p. 1.
[73] Harari, *Sapiens*, p. 322.

glory of God's plan for Creation. That belief in turn drove countless explorers and missionaries across the globe to exploit the planet's vast resources, while teaching those they conquered to do the same.

And here we must pause to gaze at yet another 'elephant in the room', this time a decidedly *male* elephant.

The biblical writers, the empire builders, the missionaries, the artists, architects, artisans, etc. who built the world we live in today, were invariably men. Indeed the term 'man', or *Homo* as in *Homo sapiens*, has traditionally been synonymous with humanity or humankind, which of course includes both sexes. But the author of a recent book on women in the modern world has argued that:

> The lives of men have been taken to represent those of humans overall. When it comes to the lives of the other half of humanity, there is often nothing but silence.[74]

The relegation of women to the side-lines runs deep in our culture and in our history. Writing nearly two-and-a-half-thousand years ago, Aristotle defined the female sex in nature as a "departure from type", as if maleness were the default condition of humanity.[75] The inferior status of women is also enshrined in the Bible.

The first book of the Old Testament, Genesis, deals with the 'creation myth', i.e. the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. According to one historian, whoever wrote it must have drawn upon "much older sacred and profane legends and annals, songs and tales".[76] So the Genesis account of Creation can be interpreted as the oral heritage of an ancient people, a kind of folk tale passed down through the centuries until eventually it was written down. In it we read that God, having created Adam, decided that"

> "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him".[77]

We are then told that God and Adam essentially 'auditioned' all the other fauna, the cattle and the birds, etc., in order to find such a "helper". When this process proved fruitless, God created a variation of the male prototype, a woman named Eve. Having already defined her as man's helper, the writers of Genesis copper-fastened the impression of woman as a divine afterthought by having God tell her that the man "shall rule over you".[78]

But is Genesis correct? The appearance of a fourth party on the scene suggests not.

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[74] Caroline Criado Perez, *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (London, 2020), p. xi.
[75] quoted in ibid, p. 1.
[76] Calvocoressi, *Who's Who in the Bible*, p. ix.
[77] Genesis, 2:18.
[78] Genesis, 3:16.

In a previous post I discussed how Satan tried unsuccessfully to tempt Jesus to abandon his mission. But "the ruler of this world" fared better when it came to Adam and Eve. In Genesis, the tempter is depicted as a talking serpent who persuades the newly-created woman to lure her male companion into an act of defiance against God by eating from the forbidden tree. When God realises what has happened, he confronts the male who in turn fingers the woman as the real culprit.[79]

But if man stands at the pinnacle of God's Creation, why did Satan not target Adam? He was the top dog, right? In the New Testament it was Jesus, not someone else like John the Baptist, whom Satan engaged in spiritual combat. That was because, as I stated in that post, "Satan knew who the *real* authority was".[80]

Was the same true for the encounter with the woman? Did the tempter recognise that, in Eve, God had refined His original Creation, just as a software engineer today improves a computer program with a new version? In short, did Satan focus on Eve because he knew she was actually stronger than Adam and that if she succumbed to temptation, Adam would too? As one commentator observed:

> Despite the fact that Adam has been warned by Yahweh [God] not to eat this particular fruit, he offers no objection and simply follows his wife's lead.[81]

But Eve is not remembered today as the authority figure, the decision-maker, in her relationship with Adam. John Milton (1608-1674) made sure of that in his epic poem, *Paradise Lost*. As another writer put it:

> Milton's voice, far and away the most influential in English in re-telling the story of the Fall of Man, put most of the blame on Eve and so provided antediluvian sanction for man's scorn of women.[82]

Long before Milton, that "scorn" was already evident as men tightened the law to circumscribe women's place in society. The 13th-century legal treatise, *De legibus et consuetudinibus Angliae* (better known as *Bracton*) reflects this view: "Women differ from men in many respects, for their position is inferior to that of men."[83] This principle was already the lynchpin of marriage laws. The 12th-century codification of the common law, *Tractatus de legibus et consuetudinibus regni Angliae* (known today as *Glanvill*) spelt out the situation for a woman contemplating marriage:

> For since legally a woman is completely in the power of her husband, it is not surprising that her dower and all her other property are clearly

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[79] Genesis, 3:1-12.
[80] The ruler of this world: Time to go? on page 143.
[81] Damian Bruce, *From Eve to Mary: Female sexuality in the Bible* (2008), p. 38.
[82] Calvocoressi, *Who's Who in the Bible*, p. 70.
[83] *Bracton Online* (http://hlsl5.law.harvard.edu/bracton/index.htm), 22 January 2009.

> deemed to be at his disposal.[84]

Many of these legal and religious restrictions have disappeared or been loosened since the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, despite the growth of feminism in the last century or so, it is still a man's world. In a recent study Caroline Perez has identified many areas of modern life which have been designed to fit the needs of men, while ignoring those of women. Among those she cites are car parks, public toilets, and farming practice. Fundamental differences between male and female biology are a common theme of these design 'blind-spots'. Indeed female biology was crucial to another issue Perez raises.

The thalidomide scandal of the early-1960s is an example of how a drug known to be hazardous to foetal development was marketed to pregnant women. By 1962, Perez writes, "over 10,000 children had been born around the world with thalidomide-related disabilities".[85]

Now, almost 60 years later, the Irish Health Service Executive (HSE) is encouraging pregnant women to "get your COVID-19 vaccine when it's offered to you", even though it also states:

> The COVID-19 vaccines are new. We are still learning about the safety of them during pregnancy. The vaccines were *not* tested on pregnant women.[86]

Here in Ireland the deception of the public about Covid-19 is led primarily by men, whether they are politicians, medical gurus, or media pundits. The body responsible for steering the government response to the pandemic is the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET). While a number of its members are women, it is men like Tony Holohan, Ronan Glynn and Cillian de Gascun who are at the forefront in promoting the culture of fear that so far has kept the public in line.

Why do we allow this to continue? Why do *women* allow this to continue?

One female author believes that feminism has failed because its objectives were wrong – too safe, not radical enough.

> Radical change is scary. It's terrifying, actually. And the feminism I support is a full-on revolution. Where women are not simply allowed to participate in the world as it already exists – an inherently corrupt world, designed by a patriarchy to subjugate and control and destroy all challengers – but are actively able to reshape it. Where women do not simply knock on the doors of churches, of governments, of capitalist marketplaces and politely

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[84] Glanvill at University of Houston (http://vi.uh.edu/pages/bob/elhone/rules.html), 22 January 2009.

[85] Perez, *Invisible Women*, p. 201.

[86] *HSE Our Health Service*, 'COVID-19 vaccines and pregnancy', 30 April 2021 [https://www2.hse.ie/screening-and-vaccinations/covid-19-vaccine/get-the-vaccine/pregnancy/], 1 May 2021. (See also Damian Bruce, *Ragged Lines*, 21 Mar. 2021, [https://damianbruce.substack.com/p/in-vaccines-we-trust], 1 May 2021.) (emphasis added).

> ask for admittance, but create their own religious systems, government, and economies. My feminism is not one of incremental change, revealed in the end to be The Same As Ever, But More So. It is a cleansing fire.[87]

Would things be any different in Ireland, and in the world, if that fire were lit and allowed to burn away the lies and fear that pervade our society? At least one man was in no doubt about the answer. In an interview with the *New York Times*, poet and song-writer Leonard Cohen expressed his position:

> I wish the women would hurry up and take over…Then we can finally recognize that women really are the minds, and the force that holds everything together, and men really are gossips and artists. Then we could get about our childish work and they could keep the world going. I really am for the matriarchy.[88]

We are still waiting because that interview took place in 1968! If, like me, you share Cohen's impatience please read my next post in which I will explore how his vision might be realised.

[87] Jessa Crispin, *Why I Am Not a Feminist: A Feminist Manifesto* (New York, 2017), p. xi.
[88] Leonard Cohen, *Songs of Leonard Cohen* (London, 2009), p. 5.

HELL INTO HEAVEN (PART 1): A NEW KIND OF REVOLUTION

First published: 15 May 2021

The first seven editions of *History in the Making* have brought us from Leo Varadkar to Leonard Cohen, via Leonardo di Caprio (no 'leonine' theme intended!). Now seems like a good time to pause and take stock. Here is a short summary of what I have written so far.

1. For over a year, government has repeatedly warned the public that "the spread of Covid-19… pose[s an]…exceptional and manifest risk…to human life and public health". Not only can I find no objective evidence that this is true, but a growing number of signs indicate the opposite, i.e. that we are being deceived.
2. This leads us into the thorny topic of 'conspiracy theories'. However, little digging is needed to unearth several officially-sanctioned conspiracies to deceive the public. We know about them because the perpetrators were publicly exposed. While we await a similar exposé in the case of Covid-19, numerous theories as to what's really going on are doing the rounds.
3. Simon Elmer argues that the clampdown on human rights was imposed by greedy capitalists and ruthless politicians to steal wealth and power from the rest of us. The result, he believes, is "a technological totalitarianism which…will make those of the Twentieth Century look like crude prototypes in comparison".
4. Kevin Galalae claims that the pandemic is a desperate plan hatched by the United Nations to halt climate change. By locking down societies across the planet, he accuses the UN and its constituent governments of using fear and deception to coerce people into sacrifices they would not make voluntarily.
5. While these two theories may be true, they do not explain fully the vast scale of the crisis facing us, which is, I believe, the culmination of a war between good and evil that has been raging for millennia. This conflict intensified during the last 2,000 years and has now reached a climax. The world we know – our culture, our civilisation - is in the grip of "the ruler of this world". Those who oppose him have a choice to make.
6. Whether through chance or design, *Homo sapiens* has developed faster and better than all other fauna. Reinforced by what the Bible and other ancient sources have told us, we humans believe that our species is entitled to dominate the Earth. We automatically equate our fortunes with those of the planet, its other inhabitants, and its resources. So are we "the ruler of this world"?
7. Or is it just men? Our world is designed and run by men, for men. So it would be wrong to allot responsibility for humanity's sorry history of pillage and persecution equally between the two sexes. We have been

> conditioned to believe that women are inferior to men - but they are not. Perhaps that is the greatest and oldest conspiracy of them all.

Would women do a better job than men? Of course we cannot know what the world would be like if the female aspect of humanity predominated. But could our plight be any worse than it is now?

Our past is a history of male domination. It is true that from time to time individual women rise to the top. But female political leaders like Golda Meir and Margaret Thatcher were not the vanguard of some new matriarchy. They achieved supremacy by beating men at their own game. Those prime ministers could be said to have achieved the status of 'honorary men'. And their male colleagues and counterparts recognised that reality when they described each woman as "the only man in the Cabinet" or "the Iron Lady".

In my last post I cited a radical feminist who demanded "a full-on revolution… a cleansing fire".[89] Maybe that is what is needed. But whether they were successful or not, previous revolutions (invariably sparked by men) left only winners and losers.

William of Orange beat James II.

Robespierre beat Louis XVI.

Lenin beat Nicholas II.

That sort of revolution changes nothing. It simply transfers power from one puppet to another and "the ruler of this world" carries on. But what if we accepted that his latest plan to lead humanity into 'Nirvana' would, like all his previous schemes, actually plunge us deeper into Hell? What if we turned finally to the only authority that can now save us and him? Or, to put it another way…

What if men willingly cede the reins of power to women, not because we think it is their turn, but for the sake of all humanity, now and to come? And, instead of relegating men to the secondary status previously theirs, what if women were then to invite men to join them as equal partners in creating a new world?

HELL INTO HEAVEN (PART 2): A DIVE INTO IRISH HISTORY - ANCIENT AND MODERN

First published: 29 May 2021

> Let us crown her a queen; and then let her do with her lands as a queen may do.[90]

These words were written in 1848 by farmer-turned-polemicist James Fintan Lalor. His theories about Irish nationalism and the land question have been circulated and cited for more than a century. His references to the "Island-queen", scattered throughout his articles and letters, have

[89] A Cleansing Fire on page 150.

[90] Lalor & Ramón, *"Faith of a Felon"*, p. 106.

been largely ignored however.

But they are important. They offer an insight into the mind of someone who looked beyond the materialistic and mercantile preoccupations of his time and ours. Lalor saw Ireland, not as a small island in the north Atlantic or as a piece of real estate to be bought and sold, but as a living presence, a living *female* presence. Ireland was, he proposed, "a poor lady" who had been "decrowned" and who must be restored to her rightful position.[91]

Lalor was not alone in his perspective. Patrick Pearse, who admired Lalor greatly, wrote that, "when I was a child I believed that there was actually a woman called Erin". Although in adulthood he did not regard this "as a physical possibility", Pearse retained a belief in the spiritual reality of what he called "the soul of Ireland".[92] And hers was an ancient soul, as Pearse conveyed in his Irish-language poem, *Mise Éire*. In translation, it begins:

I am Ireland:
I am older than the Old Woman of Beare.[93]

As I have discussed elsewhere, composer Seán Ó Riada had his own unique insight into "the soul of Ireland", which he expressed through his stirring music for the documentary film which took its title, *Mise Éire*, from Pearse's poem.[94]

The woman whom these three men perceived was hardly the figure depicted in the Bible as the "weaker sex".[95] This woman was ancient and strong, like one of those prehistoric Dolmen structures still to be seen around the country. Lalor, Pearse, and Ó Riada recognised Ireland as somehow greater than themselves - someone who inspired devotion and longing in their hearts. So who is she, this feminine presence, this Ireland?

In 1935, when he was drafting his new Constitution, Éamon de Valera insisted that "the name of the State shall be Éire".[96] In following the nomenclature used by Pearse, de Valera was tapping into Ireland's ancient mythology. Éire is a derivation of Ériu, a goddess of the Tuatha dé Danann, a mysterious race who lived in Ireland many centuries before Christ.

According to the Irish scholar, T. F. O'Rahilly, Ériu was honoured as "the Earth-mother, who was identified with the land of Ireland".[97] O'Rahilly went on to state:

In early Irish belief each king of Tara (or Ireland) on attaining the kingship

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[91] Ibid, pp. 106, 136.
[92] Pearse, *Coming Revolution*, p. 236.
[93] Patrick Pearse, *Collected works: Plays, stories, poems* (Dublin 1917), p. 323.
[94] Ó Riada an cumhachtach ("Ó Riada the magician") 4/4 on page 14.
[95] 1 Peter 3:7.
[96] Dermot Keogh & Andrew McCarthy, *The making of the Irish constitution 1937 – Bunreacht na hÉireann* (Cork, 2007), p. 324.
[97] T. F. O'Rahilly, "On the Origin of the Names Érainn and Ériu", in *Ériu* , Vol. 14 (1946), p. 11.

> was espoused to the goddess Ériu… In [one poem] we find her depicted as a lady wearing a golden crown and seated on a crystal throne, having before her a vat of red liquor, from which she pours a draught into a gold cup which she hands to each successive king of Ireland… The idea of Ireland as a woman wedded to her rightful king persisted all through the centuries… [but then] owing to the English invasion, Éire has long been widowed.[98]

So here we have a female and a queen who, through her marriage to the king, provides him with the power to rule the land. But following the Norman invasion, she was widowed, effectively dethroned. Whether she is known as Ériu, Róisín Dubh, or Caitlín Ní Uallacháin, successive generations of Irish poets, artists, and activists have venerated this mythical woman whom they identify with the land itself.

Of course Éire or Ériu represented the pagan past of a nation that, long before the Normans arrived, was Christianised by St. Patrick. But, as I argue above, that pre-Christian past continued to inspire and influence Irish political and cultural life well into the 20th century.

Perhaps the most important contribution to the continued prominence of Éire was made by the aforementioned Éamon de Valera. As a revolutionary leader prior to 1922, and a political titan during the first five decades of national independence, de Valera shaped Irish society arguably more than any other single individual. He himself was shaped by two significant influences: his Irishness and his Catholicism.

Although he was born in New York and his father was Spanish, de Valera was brought up in Ireland and spent most of his long life here. He was adamant about where his national loyalties lay.

> I have lived among the Irish people and loved them, and loved every blade of grass that grew in this land. I do not care who says or who tries to pretend that I am not Irish. I say that I have been known to be Irish and I have given everything in me to the Irish nation.[99]

De Valera was also a devout Roman Catholic who attended Mass daily.[100] Although he was never able to fulfil his dream of becoming a priest, towards the end of his life he came as close as he could. In September 1975 he was buried wearing the habit of the Carmelite order, the lay branch of which he had joined several years earlier.[101]

In preparing his Constitution for consideration by the country, de Valera obtained inputs from a number of sources, including barrister John Hearne and Jesuit priest Edward Cahill. Each produced a draft text incorporating the principles they believed should underpin the new Constitution.

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[98] Ibid, pp. 14-8 passim.
[99] Dáil Debates, vol. 50, col. 2514, 2 Mar. 1934, quoted in Anthony J. Jordan, *Éamon de Valera 1882-1975: Irish, Catholic, Visionary* (Dublin 2010), p. 11.
[100] Jordan, *Éamon de Valera*, p. 16.
[101] Ibid, p. 15.

In his draft preamble, Hearne used the terms, "Sovereign Irish People" and "Saorstát Éireann" to denote the nation or state.[102] In his text Cahill opted for "the people of Ireland".[103] However it was de Valera's choice of 'Éire' that made it into the final draft. The approved text reads as follows:

> In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity, from Whom is all authority and to Whom, as our final end, all actions both of men and States must be referred,
>
> We, the people of Éire,
>
> Humbly acknowledging all our obligations to our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ, Who sustained our fathers through centuries of trial,
>
> Gratefully remembering their heroic and unremitting struggle to regain the rightful independence of our Nation,
>
> And seeking to promote the common good, with due observance of Prudence, Justice and Charity, so that the dignity and freedom of the individual may be assured, true social order attained, the unity of our country restored, and concord established with other nations,
>
> Do hereby adopt, enact, and give to ourselves this Constitution.[104]

When he presented the draft Constitution to the Dáil, de Valera outlined the thinking behind this preamble.

> It is… from the people that the rulers get, not their authority for ruling, because that authority comes from a higher source, but their immediate designation as rulers.[105]

That "higher source" was presumably God or "the Most Holy Trinity". This would reflect the considerable influence of the Roman Catholic Church on the development of the Constitution.[106] But could "higher source" also refer to "Éire"?

The reason for de Valera's choice of "Éire" as the name for the state is unknown. In statements he made subsequently he offered several unsatisfactory explanations for his decision, such as promoting the Gaelic language.[107] Whatever his motivation it is unlikely that, as a staunch Catholic, de Valera *consciously* brought together the two strands of the nation's history, pagan and Christian, in the preamble.

On the other hand, de Valera was closely associated with Patrick Pearse in the lead up to the 1916 Rising. In addition, de Valera publicly expressed his esteem for James Fintan Lalor on several occasions during his political career. Those connections, plus his deep appreciation of Irish

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[102] Gerard Hogan, *The Origins of the Irish Constitution, 1928-1941* (Dublin, 2012), p. 172.
[103] Ibid, p. 212.
[104] 'Constitution of Ireland', *Irish Statute Book*, Jan. 2020 [http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/cons/en/html], 25 May 2021.
[105] Maurice Moynihan, *Speeches and statements by Éamon de Valera 1917-73* (Dublin 1980), p. 305.
[106] Hogan, *Origins of the Irish Constitution*, pp. 210-13.
[107] Mary E. Daly, 'The Irish Free State/Éire/Republic of Ireland/Ireland: "A Country by Any Other Name"?', *Journal of British Studies*, 46/1, Ja. 2007, pp. 76-7.

history, must have left him with some knowledge of the etymological or mystical origins of the name Éire, e.g. that in pre-Christian Ireland Ériu was the source of the king's power.

So we are left with a mystery. In the Irish Constitution, why does the name of a female pagan goddess appear directly beneath a description of God?

Lately I have been reflecting on what I learnt as a child about God.[108] My musings prompt me to pose a question which may seem strange, even blasphemous.

Is Ériu merely a goddess? Or is she God?

HELL INTO HEAVEN (PART 3): STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS

First published: 19 June 2021

The crisis that has befallen humanity since early 2020 can be overcome only by humanity itself. We won't be rescued by any third party. Not by dolphins or ET. Not by science or religion.

As individuals we can ask God for help in any difficulty and it will be there, immediately. But even God will not intervene to save the human race unless and until we demonstrate that we are worth saving.

One way, perhaps the only way, we can do this is by rethinking the assumptions that have led to the dead end in which humanity is now trapped. I believe that if women and men can find a way to work together in harmony with God and with nature, our world will be transformed beyond anything we can imagine.

As I argued in Part 1 of this series, men not only dominate the planet, its other inhabitants, and its resources, we also dominate our own species, *Homo sapiens*. Naturally women have reacted against this. Unfortunately the type of feminism that has become common in modern times is concerned more with pitting women against men than in creating a brand new way of organising society around all humans, male and female.

Some women are persuaded that the only way they can succeed is by taking on and defeating men at their own game. This perpetuates the male-designed system that has controlled our world for millennia, and which suits those women able and willing to use it better than their male rivals.

But we have an advantage here in Ireland. As I described in Part 2, a few men, notably James Fintan Lalor, Patrick Pearse, Éamon de Valera, and Seán Ó Riada, displayed an allegiance to, or at least an understanding of, a feminine ideal of Ireland. Whether through their poetry, prose, music, or political rhetoric, each man evoked an ageless truth about this country that has survived invasion, colonisation, secularisation, and consumerism.

This truth is the spiritual reality of Ireland as Éire or Ériu, a queen de-

[108] Crosbhealach, ("Cross-road") 2/2 on page 82.

throned and ravaged by a predatory male. Some identify that predator as Britain or John Bull. I refer to him as "the ruler of this world".

The cynical would dismiss these notions of a female national spirit as ignorant superstition. But even the more open-minded might regard this line of thinking as too abstract, maybe a bit airy-fairy.

After all, what did Lalor and the others think of the women around them? Did their recognition of the female essence of the country translate into empowering or forming alliances with actual, flesh-and-blood women in their own communities? And does the obvious answer – no, by the way – mean these men were hypocrites? Again, no.

Lalor, Pearse, etc., lived in a world designed and run by men. None would have claimed to be any sort of feminist, even if he understood the concept. They reflected the attitudes of their times. Other than as a sexual partner, woman was either the "helper" to her man when he needed her, or the "weaker sex" whom he was obliged to protect from danger.

An historian or researcher interested in the life of James Fintan Lalor, for example, would be hard pressed to find any female whom he regarded as playing more than a supporting role in his life. Lalor was the eldest of 12 children, nine boys and three girls. He never married and there is nothing in the scant records to indicate that he ever had romantic feelings towards any woman.[109]

Probably his longest female relationship was with his mother, Anna or Anne. She died in 1835 when James Fintan was in his late-twenties. In 1825, during his brief spell as a boarder at Carlow College, Lalor wrote to "My dear Mama". It's clear from the opening sentence that the boy viewed his mother primarily as an intermediary between himself and his father.

> In reply to my father's letter which Mr Fanning has delivered to me, you will let him know that vacation will end on the 15 of August.[110]

Perhaps the letter is an early sign of the estrangement between father and son that worsened over time. It may not be representative but, on its own, the letter does not suggest any strong empathy towards the woman who bore him in her womb for 9 months.

Given that he was hardly spoilt for choice, Patrick Pearse unsurprisingly did not include any woman in his paeans to Irish heroes. Although he respected the women around him, he tended to shy away from intimate contact with them. He valued strong women and acknowledged that their strength often exceeded that of men like himself.

In one of his essays, Pearse told the story of an old woman whom he

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[109] There is only one vaguely romantic moment recorded in the sparse Lalor archive. In one of his newspaper columns published many years later, Thomas Clarke Luby recalled spotting his old comrade trying to steal a kiss from a chamber-maid while the two men were staying at a Limerick hotel. (*Irish Nation*, 14 Apr. 1883).

[110] James Fintan Lalor to Anne Lalor, 22 Jul. 1825, National Library of Ireland, Ms. 8563/16.

saw verbally abusing a British sentry outside a Dublin barracks. Pearse connected the woman's actions to those of the Suffragettes, whom he admired. As far as he was concerned, the old woman was "one of the few unconquered souls in Ireland".[111]

Nevertheless Pearse assigned the practical task of securing Ireland's political freedom largely to men.[112] He made this plain in a statement which he read outside the GPO after he and his comrades had set the 1916 Rising in motion. Calling for support from Dublin's citizens, Pearse announced that:

> There is work for everyone: for the men in the fighting line, and for the women in the provision of food and of first aid.[113]

Frustrating as such attitudes must have seemed to those women who wanted to get closer to the action, Pearse's division of responsibilities reflected male presumptions of the time. But Pearse also hankered after something he detected in the female psyche. As a friend Mary Hayden recalled,

> He looked on the purity, the power of self-sacrifice, which is to be found more commonly in women than in men, as something divine. On this side he could understand them, for these qualities were strong in his own nature.[114]

Had he lived a few decades longer, Pearse's insights might have contributed to a greater balance between men and women in the organisation of the new state. As it was, Éamon de Valera, who led Ireland for most of its first half-century of independence, was criticised for pushing women to the margins of society.

Unlike Lalor and Pearse, de Valera was married. The union with his wife Sinéad lasted 65 years. She was, in one biographer's words, "a classic Irish housewife and mother of the period… gentle and self-effacing".[115] Dev believed himself to be a lucky man. Their son Vivion recalled his father advising him to

> 'Listen to the women, Viv. Your mother has wonderful common sense.'[116]

If this sentiment indicates that de Valera shared Pearse's appreciation of woman's considerable attributes, it did not result in the kind of radical reordering of society we need right now. Coogan contended that de Valera "had no feeling for feminism".[117] But given the misguided form that move-

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111 Pearse, *The Coming Revolution*, p. 124

112 Countess Markievicz *did* fight alongside the male rebels in 1916 but, as one scholar has pointed out, she "was exceptional and does not represent the experience of any other women." (Mary Bridget Lee, 'Redefining Éireann: The Decline of Women's Rights in the Era of Irish Nationalism 1916-¬-1937' (Thesis, University of Michigan, 2015), p. 40).

113 Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse*, p. 291.

114 quoted in ibid, p. 53.

115 Coogan, *Éamon de Valera*, p. 40.

116 quoted in ibid.

117 Ibid, p. 491.

ment took, de Valera's lack of support was hardly a character defect.

The real pity was that de Valera did not identify an alternative to copper-fastening women's second class status. So when he published his new Constitution, he was criticised for rolling back the pro-women provisions in the 1916 Proclamation and the 1922 Constitution.[118] Mary Hayden, who had noted her friend Patrick Pearse's astute understanding of the female mind, was disappointed with the provisions for women put forward by de Valera:

> 'What is proposed by the new Constitution is not a return to the Middle Ages. It is something much worse.'[119]

Unlike de Valera, Seán Ó Riada did not have to worry about the role of women in society. He was a musician, not a politician. The world of music to which he belonged in mid-century Ireland was largely a male bastion.

Ó Riada moved between two aspects of that world, traditional and classical. The first was virtually all male – there were no females in Ceoltóirí Chualann, for instance. On the other hand, the small coterie of classical musicians in Ireland was more diverse. Even in the 1940 and 50s, there were quite a few female members in the Radio Éireann Symphony Orchestra which Ó Riada sometimes conducted. However, as was the case in many other occupations, female musicians were paid less than their male counterparts.[120]

Different for women in some respects, similar in others, Ó Riada accepted both worlds as the status quo. Like the other men discussed here, Ó Riada was a revolutionary. But he would likely have agreed with the note of caution sounded by James Fintan Lalor in his advice to anyone who would lead a revolution:

> The very foremost banner should never be too far forward. In advance, but not miles nor months in advance — a stride before his regiment, a day before his people — this is a leader's place.[121]

Each of these four men: Lalor, Pearse, de Valera, and Ó Riada, harboured an intuitive appreciation of the feminine presence that sustains our country. But, for different reasons, none of them translated that understanding into actions that would have transformed Irish society. The reason is simple. The time was not right. Our world, our very species, was not confronted with the existential threat we now face.

In these turbulent and unprecedented times we could use the leadership any of these extraordinary men might have provided. But their insights can yet inspire us. We can stand on the shoulders of these giants - we, the people of Éire.

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[118] Keogh & McCarthy, *Making of the Irish constitution*, pp. 184-5.
[119] Quoted in Coogan, *Éamon de Valera*, pp. 495-6.
[120] Pat O'Kelly, *The National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, 1948-1998: A selected history* (Dublin 1998).
[121] Lalor & Ramón, *"Faith of a Felon"*, p. 110.

In Part 4 I will outline what I think we should do next.

HELL INTO HEAVEN (PART 4): "ASK, AND IT WILL BE GIVEN YOU"

First published: 03 July 2021

If our experience in Ireland since March 2020 has taught us anything, it is that religion can flourish without God. Once upon a time our lives revolved around a belief in the unseen presence of an omnipotent deity. Nowadays, daily life is governed by the reported doings of a mysterious virus imperceptible to the naked eye.

Instead of hanging on the words of a priest in the pulpit as we once did, the faithful now listen to the statistics and prognostications of government officials. Before entering a church, men used to remove their hats or caps while women donned a head scarf. Now both sexes automatically put on a face mask before going into a shop (or a church for that matter). For Roman Catholics the practice of confession and holy communion used to be the accepted routes back to righteous living. These have now been supplanted by the PCR test and the 'double jab' of a hypodermic needle.

Have we simply substituted one set of irrational practices for another? Are both types of ritual evidence of our species' stubborn adherence to unfounded superstition? Or do we just like being told what to do by experts, whether they wear white collars or white coats?

For whatever reason, we have adopted the trappings and customs of Covid-19 as if they were the visible signs of a new religious faith. Ironically the recent behaviours I have described are being adopted just as the old forms of religious observance are dying out.

But if religion without God is possible, is the inverse also true? Is it possible to believe in God - without following the precepts and creeds of any religious denomination? Previously I wrote:

> As individuals we can ask God for help in any difficulty and it will be there, immediately. But even God will not intervene to save the human race unless and until we demonstrate that we are worth saving.[122]

Of course not everyone accepts the existence of God. So I cannot assume that those who share my belief that we are being deceived about the threat of a virulent pandemic also share my faith in God.

Some people do not believe in God because that is how they were raised. Much more likely, in this part of the world at any rate, is for someone to become an atheist or agnostic after rejecting the religious beliefs of their families and teachers. A good example is the late Christopher Hitchens, an English writer from a Christian/Jewish background.

In his book, *God is Not Great*, Hitchens applied his intellectual and verbal skills to the task of rationalising his own atheism. However, as his book's subtitle suggests, Hitchens' primary target was religion - God or an

[122] Hell into Heaven (Part 3): Standing on the shoulders of giants on page 160.

afterlife, not so much.[123] While he took several swipes at Judaism and Islam, Christianity was his main focus.

Whether it was evangelist Billy Graham or film maker Mel Gibson, Hitchens excoriated any public figure whom he deemed to be claiming inside knowledge of the workings of divine providence. He did not hold back when he tackled religious commentators either, such as fellow writer C. S. Lewis,. Although I read the book as a believer I found myself nodding in agreement at some of Hitchens' points, especially his repeated claim that "religion is man-made".[124]

For example, he devoted one of his chapters to the New Testament and its protagonist, Jesus Christ. His criticisms might be predictable, but they are also hard to refute. Hitchens described the New Testament as having been "hammered together long after its purported events".[125] He also highlighted numerous discrepancies between the four Gospel accounts of Jesus' life. He even questioned whether Jesus was an historical figure at all.

However, even as he doubted his very existence, Hitchens could not quite make up his mind about Jesus. Based on his reading of the Gospels, Hitchens was perplexed by Jesus' sometimes strange behaviour. For instance, if Jesus intended to start a new religion, why did he or his disciples not leave any written record behind? For Hitchens, such lack of foresight was "The best argument I know for the highly questionable existence of Jesus".[126]

Secondly, when Jesus urged his listeners to "take no thought for the morrow", was he also telling them to ignore the virtues of thrift and innovation? Surely, pondered Hitchens, that would have been irresponsible?[127]

Finally, asked Hitchens, why did Jesus not uphold the Mosaic law by agreeing that the woman taken in adultery should be stoned? Instead he "bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground". Hitchens also referred to what Jesus said to the crowd gathered round the unfortunate woman.

> Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.[128]

Was Jesus condoning sexual permissiveness, Hitchens wondered? Was he undermining the justice system by insisting that only non-sinners could adjudicate in criminal trials? If Hitchens was confused by all this, he

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[123] Christopher Hitchens, *God is not great: How religion poisons everything* (New York, 2007).
[124] Ibid, p. 10.
[125] Ibid, p. 110.
[126] Ibid, p. 114.
[127] Ibid, p. 118.
[128] John 8:2-11.

"love[d]" the idea that what Jesus was writing on the ground were the sins of those present.[129]

Christopher Hitchens took a direct approach when he dismantled the religious beliefs of his youth. Another writer of much greater literary distinction went about the same task in quite a different way.

As a young man, James Joyce turned his back on the Roman Catholic religion of his childhood. Joyce traced the development of his thinking on religion in two autobiographical novels, *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In both works, Joyce used the protagonist Stephen Dedalus as a proxy for himself. Dedalus' growing antipathy towards religion and its proponents is evident in these writings.

For instance, in *Stephen Hero*, Dedalus lambasts the "sycophants and hypocrites" who claim to be Christian but do not follow the church's precepts.[130] In *Portrait*, Joyce recounts a dialogue between the student Dedalus and a Jesuit priest. The exchanges are more like a verbal duel, at least on Dedalus' side, in which the young student demonstrates his intellectual superiority over the older man.[131] In one passage Dedalus seems almost contemptuous of the priest whom he considers to be a dullard.[132] Joyce projects that feeling onto the Creator himself, whom Dedalus dismisses as "The half-witted God of the Roman Catholics".[133]

Yet despite his rejection of Christianity, Joyce/Dedalus shared Christopher Hitchens' fascination with Jesus and his "enigmatic utterances".[134] Dedalus even comes close to expressing admiration for the "good-humoured" attitude with which Jesus approached his crucifixion.[135] And both writers were puzzled by what Joyce described as Jesus' "humane" attitude towards "loose women".[136]

Nevertheless the strange attraction that Jesus exerted over these men did not stop either from becoming an atheist. Admittedly it is difficult, even for intellectuals like Hitchens and Joyce, to find the 'real' Jesus amidst the accretions, distortions, and fabrications embedded in the canonical Gospels. I believe it *is* possible, but it is also unlikely that anyone predisposed to scepticism about the subject would think it worth their time.

As I described elsewhere, Beatle John Lennon suspected that there is a fundamental difference between Jesus the man and Jesus the myth.[137] But

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[129] Hitchens, *God is not great*, pp. 121-2.
[130] James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, ed. Theodore Spencer (New York, 1963), p. 141.
[131] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Ware, 1992), pp. 142-7.
[132] Ibid, p. 144.
[133] Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, p. 210.
[134] Ibid, p. 112.
[135] Ibid, p. 140.
[136] Ibid, p. 141.
[137] Is cuimhin le Lennon ("Lennon remembers") on page 88.

he never probed any deeper; nor did Hitchens or Joyce. All three are dead now so the whys and wherefores are beyond our concern.

But it is not just Jesus is it? The God that critics like Hitchens attack is the deity imagined by the man-made religions they deplore. In Christian terms that is the God of Old Testament fire and brimstone, of petty rules and prohibitions, of indifference to human suffering. In other words, he is the God *we* have created, an anthropomorphised being who reflects the many flaws and imperfections of our damaged species.

But can we learn about God without the mediation of organised religion?

A consequence of government restrictions in Ireland is that places of worship have been closed for quite some time. This prevents Christians from participating personally in formal devotions like Sunday Mass. In effect, it means that people have not been able to practise their religion as they used to.

When the predictable rhythm of our lives is suddenly halted, especially in a fundamental area like religion, the effects can be traumatic. Precisely how difficult this has been for ordinary church-goers is unknown and might remain so. But could there be an upside?

In her novel, *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë recounted the spiritual and material trials of her protagonist, a young woman who has to choose between her love for Mr. Rochester and her Christian principles. To anyone from a Roman Catholic background, Brontë may seem quite unorthodox in her thinking about Christianity. For example she wrote this in her preface to the second edition of *Jane Eyre*:

> Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion.[138]

As a recent study contends, Brontë's free thinking sprang from her religious background.

> One of the central tenets of Protestant Christianity is the belief that individuals have the ability to hear from God directly, to interpret God's will for themselves, to act accordingly, and thus to become responsible for their own salvation.[139]

Charlotte Brontë was a lifelong Anglican who never lost her faith. This explains why the character of Jane Eyre is not like Joyce's Stephen Dedalus in that she does not become disillusioned with God or Christianity. But, in the face of extreme personal deprivation, Jane demonstrates that her faith is not dependent on the familiar supports of religious dogma and ritual.

At a certain point in Brontë's narrative, Jane is tired, hungry, and utterly alone in a barren landscape. She is ready to surrender her life as she teeters on the brink of despair. But she summons up her last reserves

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[138] Quoted in Emily Griesinger, 'Charlotte Brontë's Religion: Faith, Feminism, and "Jane Eyre"', *Christianity and Literature*, 58/1, 2008, p. 33.
[139] Ibid, p. 32.

of hope and courage, uttering these words aloud:

> I can but die…and I believe in God. Let me try to wait His will in silence.[140]

These are the words of faith, pure faith, and they probably reflect Brontë's own inner convictions. But they are not the words of an atheist or a sceptic like Christopher Hitchens or James Joyce.

Neither of them would have allowed such a sentiment to enter their minds, let alone speak it. For both men it would have been hypocritical to turn to a God they did not believe in, just because He *might* exist and could save them from some extreme peril.

But in the relative calm before peril struck, would they have paused to consider the possibility that belief in God can exist irrespective of adherence to any religious creed? Could they have imagined that God might not be the stern and hirsute figure depicted on the Sistine Chapel ceiling? That He might not be a "He" at all?

Is it fanciful to think of God as a young girl smiling in the sunshine? Or as a butterfly that flits across a meadow on a spring morning? Or as the breeze that blows through the leaves in the corner of the garden? Or as all these things, and much, much more besides? Because how can the mind of any human capture or compress a divine creator, if such a being actually exists?

As we enter a new world, devoid of the familiar trappings and comforts of the old, perhaps opening our minds to these possibilities is a first step in transforming our Hell into Heaven.

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[140] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, in *The Bronte Sisters: The Complete Novels* (London, 2006), p. 325.

ONCE UPON A TIME… SOMETIMES FAIRY TALES DO COME TRUE

First published: 18 July 2021

Every week I read a story to my grandson Gerard. He is learning to read himself so I think he will be looking for other amusements soon. For the moment though he seems happy enough to hear me read from one of the children's books I have picked up over the years. To be honest, I enjoy these stories myself - especially the less-familiar ones.

At the moment Gerard and I are working our way through Hans Christian Andersen's Fairy Tales. As well as the better-known stories, like "The Little Mermaid", "The Ugly Duckling", and "The Emperor's New Clothes", there are others I have never heard of. So, having exhausted the famous ones, we are now delving into the less familiar territory.

Usually I ask Gerard to pick whatever tale he fancies hearing. Recently he chose "The Wicked Prince".[141] Interesting title I thought as I began to read:

> Once upon a time there was a prince who was terribly proud and wicked. His dream was to rule over all the countries of the world, so people everywhere would tremble at the sound of his name.

I was hooked and so was my grandson. As I went on I became slightly concerned that the story might be a little too dark for Gerard's young mind. But I decided to trust in Hans Christian Andersen's instincts as a story-teller, and so I carried on reading.

Then the tale of the wicked prince reached a crucial point. Having at last achieved his goal of ruling the world, there is only one power left for the prince to overcome: God. The prince's first attempt to defeat God ends in failure. But that failure makes the prince even more determined. As he reflects on his downfall he vows to try again.

> "I *will* conquer God!" he murmured.

And so he spends several more years planning and preparing for his next contest with God. He puts together an even greater army than before. With this vast armada behind him, the prince launches his assault on Heaven. But once again he is foiled. The story ends with the prince's humiliation and death, brought about by the sting of a tiny insect sent by God to stop the aggressor.

"The Wicked Prince" was more than I bargained for. What a great story! When I put down the book I thanked Gerard for choosing it. But really I could not say any more. Here was a tale for children written in 1840 that described the world of the distant past - and the world of today.

While he was fasting in the desert, hadn't Jesus encountered someone very like the wicked prince, someone he called "the ruler of this world", also known as Lucifer or Satan? Hadn't this "ruler" tried to divert Jesus

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[141] *Hans Christian Andersen's Fairy Tales*, compiled by Vic Parker (Thaxted, Essex, 2016), pp. 373-83.

away from his mission through his ploys and temptations? Indeed, did the devil's failure only make him more determined to try again, not just to defeat Jesus, but to defeat God Himself? And are the extraordinary things we have seen since early 2020 a sign that this satanic plan is now being executed?

There are several theories as to what may lie behind the huge deception now gripping our world. I have described two of them in previous articles.[142] These show how entities as different as Pfizer and Extinction Rebellion can reap potential benefits in the "new normal". And there are plenty of other examples.

For instance, the use of digital transactions has rocketed as bank notes and coins are now deemed to be 'unsafe'. This is great for the banks. If the trend continues, they will be able to reduce their costs by getting rid of many of their cash-handling staff. Another example is mainstream media, notably radio. Sound broadcasters have seen their audiences grow as they pursue a strategy of relentless fear-mongering and unquestioning acceptance of the pseudo-science promoted by politicians and senior officials.[143] And those same politicians in government have learnt that they can achieve tighter control over civil society by undermining the rights of their fellow citizens.

Whether these developments are the result of opportunism or conspiracy is a matter for debate. What is clear, I believe, is that these players, whether they are in politics, business, media, etc., have one thing in common. Whether they realise it or not, they all ultimately serve a single master, "the ruler of this world", whose abiding objective is, as Hans Christian Andersen so succinctly put it, to "conquer God".

As I outlined in my last article, many people reject the image of a divine creator presented to them by man-made religions. I am one of them. But if I don't accept the vengeful God of the Old Testament, for instance, that does not make me an atheist. Because I am not. I believe in the God that pre-existed everything, not just religion but our very species, *Homo sapiens*. But who is this God? Can we ever know – in this life at any rate? In the same article I wrote this:

> Is it fanciful to think of God as a young girl smiling in the sunshine? Or as a butterfly that flits across a meadow on a spring morning? Or as the breeze that blows through the leaves in the corner of the garden? Or as all these things - and much, much more besides?

Hans Christian Andersen believed in God. But his faith, like that of his contemporary Charlotte Brontë, was not exactly orthodox. We are told that "he rarely went to church", and that:

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142 Green or Gold? (Part 1): The "Gold" Agenda on page 135.

143 *Irish Times*, 5 Nov. 2020, "A friend in a crisis – why Irish radio had a good pandemic" [https://www.irishtimes.com/business/media-and-marketing/a-friend-in-a-crisis-why-irish-radio-had-a-good-pandemic-1.4401265], 16 Jul. 2021.

> the only religious tenets which mattered to him were providence, grace, and immortality, which he increasingly saw as a compensation for the pain and injustices of mortal life.[144]

Andersen did not believe in Hell either, or at least not as a place of eternal punishment to which God consigns the souls of the damned.[145] Perhaps the best way to understand Andersen's view of the afterlife is to read one of his later stories entitled simply, "A history".[146] He wrote it in a style similar to that of his more famous children's tales, but this one is really for adults I think.

The story is about a Protestant minister and his wife. One day the minister's wife is attending a church service given by her husband. He is clearly of the same fire and brimstone school as James Joyce's notorious preacher.[147] As she sits in the congregation, the wife hears her husband describe the horrors that await those impious souls deserving of eternal damnation in Hell.

Later that evening, the woman speaks to her husband about the distress she felt as she listened to his sermon. She tells him that:

> I should not let even the vilest of sinners burn for ever; and how then would God Almighty, who is so infinitely good, and who can know what makes the bad so bad?

Sometime later the minister's wife dies and he is left alone. One night her spirit visits him and asks him to accompany her on a special mission. She wants him to identify just one person whom, as she puts it, "God will condemn to everlasting misery" in the next life. Together they journey through the city, visiting mansions and hovels, prisons and saloons, all filled with examples of mankind's propensity for greed, pride, envy, and so on. But in each case the preacher cannot bring himself to single out even one individual deserving of divine retribution. On the contrary he is moved to pity by the degradation, the living Hell, into which these unfortunates have sunk.

When she sees how her husband has been affected by what he witnessed, the spirit of his wife realises that he has overcome his "despair in humanity". Before she departs she tells him:

> Learn to know man! Even in the bad there dwells a part of God; that part which quenches and conquers the flame of Hell!

Hans Christian Andersen believed in the devil, and in his writings he acknowledged the existence of evil. But he could not reconcile two contradictory images of God: the loving God he knew from childhood, and a deity who would condemn sinners to endless torture with no possibility of es-

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[144] Jackie Wullschläger, *Hans Christian Andersen: The life of a storyteller* (New York, 2001), p. 402.
[145] Hans Christian Andersen, *Story of My Life* and *In Sweden* (London, 1852), p. 38.
[146] Ibid, pp. 215-20
[147] Hell into Heaven (Part 4): "Ask, and it will be given you" on page 164.

cape or redemption.

This second image is, I am convinced, a grotesque caricature. Its main purpose is to demoralise and discourage anyone who might try to find the real God. Andersen wisely rejected it. If we do likewise, who knows what previously unimagined possibilities will open up? Perhaps even the prospect that, in the end, the wicked prince himself will be saved. Were that to happen, the history books would surely record that we all lived happily ever after.

THE EMPTY CHURCH: A LAYMAN'S VIEW OF THE CURRENT STATE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH (2002)

First published: 31 July 2021

In March 2002 I submitted this article to *The Irish Times.* However *t*he paper did not publish the piece and it appears now for the first time.

Apart from one or two typos which I have corrected, it is exactly as I wrote it almost 20 years ago. The main title is taken from emptychurch .org, a now-defunct web site I set up during the mid-2000s.

I wrote the article in a state of disgust after watching a television programme about Ireland's Magdalen laundries. Set in the 1960s, *Sinners* was a dramatisation of life in a fictionalised home for unmarried mothers. It was screened in the wake of a flood of revelations exposing the unsavoury side of one of Ireland's most revered institutions, the Roman Catholic Church.

The first book I read on the subject was Paddy Reilly's *The God Squad* in the late-1980s. It took a while longer for the dam to burst which eventually it did with TV documentaries like *Dear Daughter* and *States of Fear*.

The brutality and occasional depravity I had seen in my own Catholic day-school prepared me for the greater horrors revealed in these accounts. Thankfully I could go home every afternoon. The unfortunates held in the industrial schools, orphanages, and laundries had to stay there, sometimes for years.

The abuse of women and children could not have happened on such a massive scale without state complicity or public indifference. What stuck in my gullet though was that the Catholic Church - supposedly there to represent God - not only did not stop this great evil, but actually perpetuated it.

* * *

I am not a priest, nor am I a theologian or a philosopher. I am not even what one might call an active Catholic layperson. Like many Irish people of my generation, I was raised as a Catholic, went to a Catholic school, and generally accepted the various beliefs of my Faith. As a child I served Mass and had the pleasure of experiencing the rituals and mystery of the old Latin rite before it was banned. The Catholic Church, to me, was the one true Church outside of which it was impossible to be saved.

Nowadays, however, I am feeling increasingly betrayed. The Church to which I have given my allegiance is revealed to have many skeletons in its closet, completely at odds with its divine mission.

How is it possible that an organisation that claims to follow the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth could also be responsible for the litany of crimes that are now receiving long-overdue publicity? Everyone is familiar with the well-known examples of institutional child abuse and the Magdalen

laundries. Of course, as a boy growing up in Catholic Ireland, I was aware of the Church's attitude to extra- or pre-marital sex. On the other hand, my childish mind was also more dimly aware that physical contact with certain men of the cloth was to be avoided. If I ever tried to reconcile these darker aspects of the Church with what I understood to be the teachings of Jesus Christ, it was too easy to push such contradictions aside as mysteries beyond my understanding. I cannot do that anymore.

It does not require a theological or philosophical qualification to distinguish right from wrong. It is wrong to rape anyone, let alone a young and vulnerable child. It is wrong to tolerate such actions if you have the power to prevent them, even if that power extends only to notifying the police. It is wrong to deprive young women of their liberty and their dignity simply because they have become pregnant out of wedlock. Subscribing to the beliefs and rules of any organisation does not eliminate or diminish the responsibility to follow one's conscience, no matter the consequences. And that applies to us all, from lay people like me to Cardinals and Popes.

Ultimately, the Catholic Church must serve as the means to a greater end, not as an end in itself. That greater end, surely, is to show its members how to know, love, and serve God. And what must God think of the Catholic Church today? A rhetorical question perhaps, but does it really require such a leap of imagination to figure out? If we cannot second-guess the mind of God, then can we learn anything from the life of Jesus?

Even someone with a superficial knowledge of the Gospels can see that here was a man trying very hard to understand and carry out God's will. He was eager to teach anyone who would listen how to live a good life. His own example is probably the best lesson he could offer. For instance, when he showed his concern for the children whom his disciples were trying to keep away from him. Or his kindness to the woman taken in adultery when her accusers wanted to kill her. Clearly, Jesus would have been appalled and angry that any of his so-called followers could abuse women and children. Given that Jesus devoted his life to God, then maybe we can begin to understand what God must think of those who have committed or tolerated the horrors we are constantly reading about and seeing on our television screens.

I sometimes wonder also what ordinary Catholics of my own generation and older must think about all that is happening in the Catholic Church today. Many must be disillusioned, to the point of severing all connection with the Church. Perhaps others go further and abandon belief in a God Who could allow Himself to be represented by what they see as an irredeemably corrupt institution. No doubt others continue to give their allegiance to the Church, perhaps out of habit, or because they are in denial. Ultimately, each person must decide for him or herself. Well, here is what I now believe.

If the history of the Catholic Church has taught us anything it is that we cannot look to any institution for example in how to live a good life, never mind how to seek God. In the case of the Church, one only has to read about the Crusades or the Spanish Inquisition to realise that. Instead we must turn to the true followers of Jesus, those men and women who developed such a relationship with God that it transformed their lives. I refer to the likes of Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, or in our own time, Padre Pio, who is due to be canonised soon. These three developed such a deep love of God that they drew others to them. In the case of St. Thérèse this happened most spectacularly after her death. What they had in common was a direct personal relationship with God. To me, this seems to be the only way that anyone with a spiritual hunger can reach fulfilment.

Young children were not afraid to approach Jesus. They were simply responding to his evident goodness. Unfortunately we have been taught to keep God at a distance, to hold Him in such reverential awe that we dare not approach. Is this what God wants, to be surrounded by fawning subjects like some tin-pot dictator? This is not to suggest that the alternative is the kind of 'matey' attitude that some feel is appropriate. The truth is we all have an image of God that is probably nothing like the reality.

For instance, we all agree that God is male, don't we? Anyone using the female pronoun to refer to God must be a feminist of the most extreme kind. Well if God is a man, that must mean men are closer to God than women are. Men, especially, will see immediately how ridiculous that notion is. If anything, biology alone would make it more likely that God's nature is female rather than male. After all, women, not men, give birth to new life. So, when I have to use a pronoun for God, 'She' and 'Her' make greater sense to me.

So what other inaccuracies are there in our perceptions of God? The only way to find out is to get to know Her, just as we would any person in whom we were interested. By learning that it is possible, not only to speak to God, but to hear Her voice, not as some miraculous or paranormal experience, but as an inner awareness. And through this form of 'silent prayer', God can draw us closer to Her and, perhaps, even make use of us to counteract the evils that I have referred to in this article.

If this sounds like pious nonsense, then nothing written here will persuade you otherwise. But for anyone not immediately dismissive, consider that we have only one life here on Earth. Is there a better way to spend it?

THE REAL JESUS? AN IMAGINED DIALOGUE BETWEEN A 21ST-CENTURY MAN AND JESUS AS HE PRAYS IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

*First published: 14 August 2021**

Almost 20 years ago I set up a web site called emptychurch.org. Its purpose was to explore various aspects of Roman Catholicism, the branch of Christianity with which I am most familiar. This reflected my belief that much of what I had learnt about the origins of Christianity was wrong.

I loved the Roman Catholic Church, in particular the rich ceremonial aspects, many of which were discarded in the 1960s. For a long time I hoped that, somehow, things would get back to normal. But they did not; things just got worse, as I discuss elsewhere.[148]

The piece that follows was originally published in 2004 on empty church.org.* It was an attempt to channel my frustration, and yes my anger, into a form that would cut through centuries of lies and distortions.

Is it true? Could it be true? I don't know. It might be.

* * *

21st-c. man I am very sorry for disturbing you. Is your name Jesus or Yeshua? If this is a bad time I can come back later. Although I don't think there is much time left so maybe we could talk now.

Jesus I am Jesus. Who are you? Are you here to arrest me?

21st-c. man No I am a friend. It is difficult to explain, but here goes. I have come from the far future to tell you something of what is going to happen next. Not only in your own life, but long afterwards.

Jesus I have been praying. Has my Father sent you?

21st-c. man Perhaps, I don't know. I think I am dreaming and somehow my self or my essence has been sent back 2,000 years to meet you. I have been thinking about you a lot, wondering what you were really like as a person. By the way, you don't look at all like we imagine you in our time.

Jesus Maybe I am dreaming too, but I would welcome some company. My companions are asleep over there. You say you have come from 2,000 years in the future to talk to me. How do you even know about me?

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[148] The Empty Church: A layman's view of the current state of the Catholic Church (2002) on page 173.

21st-c. man Well, that is what I want to talk to you about. I am still trying to take in how much your appearance differs from the images of you in our time. You are usually portrayed as a tall strong figure, pale-skinned and with flowing brown hair and beard.

Jesus The only pale-skinned people around here are the Governor and his soldiers. I am a Judean and this is what we look like. And as you can see, I am not very tall or strong-looking but this is how God made me.

21st-c. man Of course, I didn't mean to offend you.

Jesus I am not offended. I am very interested in what you have to say.

21st-c. man It is difficult to know where to start. Maybe I will begin by answering your question about how I know about you. Most people in our world have heard of you. You are the most important person to have lived during the last 2,000 years. The details of your life and teachings have been recorded and passed down through the generations. They have inspired millions of people to try to live good lives.

Jesus This is extraordinary. Are you Jewish?

21st-c. man No, I am a Christian. That is what people who follow your teach-ings call themselves. It is based on the title bestowed upon you, the Christ. It means the Anointed One.

Jesus But what about the Jews in your world?

21st-c. man Most of them do not accept your teachings or regard you as the Messiah.

Jesus The Messiah?

21st-c. man Yes, we regard you as the promised one, sent by God to save us from our sins.

Jesus This sounds like you have elevated me to some kind of god, like the Roman emperors.

21st-c. man Not some kind of god, God Himself, or His only Son anyway.

Jesus I must be hallucinating. Look, can you start at the beginning please and explain what you are talking about? You are making no sense whatsoever.

21st-c. man OK, I am sorry. I thought that somehow you knew all about this. But I will start at the beginning. Very soon, soldiers will come to arrest you. You will be put on trial and I am afraid you will be executed within the next few days.

Jesus Yes, I know. My Father has shown me what is to happen and I accept His Will.

21st-c. man Following your death, a man named Saul will start spreading your teachings around this country and other countries.

Jesus I don't know any such man. Who is he?

21st-c. man He never actually met you, but he will have a vision of you and, as a result, will come to believe he has been charged by God to spread your Gospel, that is, your teachings.

Jesus I have come across a lot of people like that. They believe they alone are divinely inspired and everyone must listen to them.

21st-c. man Well anyway, the Jewish authorities don't like Saul's, or Paul as he now calls himself, Paul's activities. Effectively there is a split between the Jews and the new Christians. The Romans don't like the Christians either and they are persecuted.

Jesus Stop just a moment. You seem to be describing some sort of schism within Judaism, a breakaway group led by this Paul, and all in my name.

21st-c. man Well, yes. That is one way of looking at it.

Jesus But I am a devout Jew. My concern has always been to root out the corruption that has become embedded in Judaism. I have been trying to remind our leaders of the

purity of what Moses taught us. I certainly do not want to start a new cult with me at its centre.

21st-c. man Really?! This is a shock to say the least. We have been taught that you came into the world to found a new church, that you appointed Peter as its first head, and that you set up the initial structures with your apostles as its first bishops.

Jesus This is definitely an hallucination, or worse a nightmare. Are you the Devil come to tempt me again? I did not listen to you in the desert and I won't listen to you now.

21st-c. man Please! I am not the Devil. I am telling you the truth. Look, we even measure time in our world according to the year of your birth. I come from the year 2004, which means 2,004 years after your birth. We regard you as God. There is a huge organisation called the Catholic Church that believes it is the only custodian of your teachings. It is led by a man called the Pope who lives in Rome.

Jesus He sounds like the Emperor.

21st-c. man No, he is not the Emperor. The Roman Empire vanished a long time ago. The Pope has no armies. He exercises moral authority over the members of the Catholic Church.

Jesus I cannot believe that this will happen in my name. Maybe it is my own fault. If I had more time to develop my teachings, write them down myself, then they could not become so distorted.

21st-c. man But is it not God's Will that you go willingly to your fate?

Jesus Yes it is, but only because of the circumstances that have developed. You see, I have always believed that true Judaism can be restored only when the Romans have been driven out of our land. They are the corrupting influence. So I came to believe that violent revolution was the only way to achieve this. This attracted certain kinds of hot head who were eager to attack the Romans. Peter, for instance, has a good heart but he is also impetuous. I would never dream of appointing him leader as you suggest.

21st-c. man But are you saying that you actually wanted to use violence against the Romans?

Jesus I could see no alternative. They are brutal and corrupt. They would never leave voluntarily. At the same time I hesitated. I knew many people would be killed and I longed to find another way. Then, just a few days ago, trouble erupted when I entered Jerusalem. People were killed and I knew I would be blamed. Some of my friends urged me to take advantage of the situation and declare an uprising, but I could not do it. Now I must await my fate.

21st-c. man You seem to be saying that things could have been different, should have been different.

Jesus Yes. I should have trusted God more. He did not want bloodshed. He wanted me to show people through my example how they could serve Him better.

21st-c. man But we have been told that you came into the world to suffer and die, that this is what God wanted to happen.

Jesus You must have a strange view of God if you think He would want anyone to suffer and die. No, I see now that He wanted me to influence others through my teachings and through my obedience to His Will. And to accept whatever suffering came my way, but there are many forms of suffering - not just physical torture.

21st-c. man This is all so strange and unexpected. Of course I believe what you say. But it seems that we have been seriously misled about what your life was all about.

Jesus Yes it sounds like it. I hear voices in the distance. And look! There are lights approaching. They are coming for me. You must go.

21st-c. man But I feel I should help you in some way.

Jesus You have kept me company at my darkest hour, although what you say has disturbed me. When you get back to your own time, think carefully about my life and what it really meant. Don't allow others to tell you what you

should and should not believe about God. Find Him for yourself and learn to obey Him in all you do. That would be the greatest gift you could give me now.

21st-c. man I will try. Thank you for allowing me to be with you. No matter what happens next you are in God's hands.

Jesus His Will be done.

DEATH AS A PUBLIC SPECTACLE: WAS THE PAST REALLY "A DIFFERENT COUNTRY"?

First published: 28 August 2021

While I was a student of history I attended a lecture on the subject of medieval medicine. The speaker spoke about the practice of placing leeches on the body of a patient to facilitate blood-letting, a common medical procedure during the Middle Ages. One of my fellow-students was astonished by the very idea. As we left the lecture room he whispered to me, "They were all mad back then, weren't they?"

His comment stayed with me, maybe because I felt he was not referring merely to an obsolete medical practice. What he said seemed to encapsulate an assumption in the modern mind that humanity has progressed to such a higher plane of consciousness that the attitudes and behaviours of our ancestors now look primitive and barbaric.

I wanted to see if there was any substance in the charge. I wondered if an examination of historic attitudes to punishment and death would tell me what I wanted to know. So I decided to dig a bit deeper.

The question in my mind was this. In their overall sensibilities towards pain and suffering, were the citizens of earlier societies less refined and sophisticated than the modern man or woman? Or to put it another way, was L. P. Hartley correct when he wrote: "The past is a different country: they do things differently there."?[149]

What follows is an essay I wrote on this topic in 2012. Most of my research related to *ancien regime* (pre-revolutionary) France. I have edited the original to make it more readable and taken out some irrelevant bits.

* * *

In March 1792, the French Legislative Assembly issued a decree concerning the manner in which sentences of capital punishment would henceforth be carried out. The decree, which stated 'that humanity requires that the death penalty be as painless as possible', heralded the introduction of the guillotine as the sole means of execution 'throughout the entire kingdom'.[150] The guillotine's inventor, Dr. Antoine Louis, in a submission to the Assembly two weeks earlier, emphasised the necessity of moving away from the traditional forms of capital punishment, which he stated were 'horrible for the victim and the spectators', to a method that 'would cause no feeling and would scarcely be perceived'.[151]

Spectators? Yes, executions took place in a public space with some-

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[149] Hartley, *Go-Between*, p. 9.

[150] 'Decree concerning the Death Penalty, 20 Mar. 1792', in John Hall Stewart, *A documentary survey of the French Revolution* (New York, 1951), pp 343-4.

[151] 'Motivated Opinion on the Method of Decapitation, 7 Mar. 1792', in ibid, pp 343-4.

times thousands of onlookers witnessing the protracted agonies of the condemned person. In some countries, like the USA and France, these grim spectacles continued well into the 20th century. In parts of Africa and Asia, executions are still carried out in public. In this essay, however, the focus is on the more distant past, i.e. the late middle ages and the early modern period. So how did the French state execute convicted criminals before the guillotine?

Five options were available to the judiciary in deciding on the most appropriate form of capital punishment to be applied to a guilty person. They were decapitation, hanging, burning at the stake, drawing and quartering, and breaking on the wheel. While the last two were designed to inflict pain on the victim, the first two often failed to deliver the kind of instantaneous end a modern observer might have assumed.

Decapitation was carried out with a sword and sometimes it took several blows to sever the head from the body. In 1699 at the Place de Grève in Paris, the state executioner, Charles-Henri Sanson, finally beheaded Madame Tiquet on his third attempt, delivered according to family records, 'with a kind of frenzy'. By then he was covered in blood as a result of his previous botched efforts to despatch the victim. The account does not record if she was already dead before the *coup de grace*.[152]

Hanging, the most common form of execution, did not bring immediate death either. Unlike the later technique which broke the victim's neck when he or she dropped through a trapdoor, the condemned man or woman was slowly strangled after being pushed from a ladder. As with beheading, a lack of expertise by the executioner could prolong the victim's torment. In one example from late-seventeenth-century Avignon, a problem with the ladder prevented the rope swinging freely. In order to expedite his task, the hangman leapt onto the condemned man's shoulders and began kicking him in the stomach. However, the victim was saved when the crowd stormed the scaffold and rescued him 'after he had been hanging there longer than it took to say a full *Miserere'*.[153]

Although being burnt at the stake theoretically involved a period of intense agony before death ensued, the victim was usually strangled quickly before the fire was lit. Consequently, of the five modes of execution, this was probably the least painful for the victim. The execution of Joan of Arc on 30 May 1431 is an exception that proves the rule. She was to be put to death in the market place of Rouen having been convicted of the crime of heresy. Given her fame and the great number of spectators expected, Joan was placed on a raised platform so that her death could be seen clearly when the burning wood below consumed her. However, the

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[152] Henri Sanson, (ed.), *Executioners all; memoirs of the Sanson family from private notes and documents, 1688-1847* (London, 1962), p. 34.
[153] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison* (London, 1977), p. 64.

executioner later revealed his distress at the fact that, because of the inaccessibility of the platform, he could not end the victim's life before she was engulfed by fire.

In these modes of execution, the infliction of pain on the convicted person was not an intentional part of the execution process itself. However, in the case of the two remaining methods, i.e. drawing and quartering and breaking on the wheel, mental and physical suffering was an inevitable and deliberate consequence of what was designed to be a prolonged procedure. However these two modes of dispensing death were confined exclusively to men.

A sentence of quartering entailed the application of sundry tortures to the condemned man's body, following which he was torn limb from limb by four horses. In early modern France, the most notable victim was Robert–François Damiens, sentenced in 1757 for a knife attack on King Louis XV. Damiens' execution was modelled on that of François Ravaillac, who was dismembered in 1610 for the murder of one of Louis' predecessors, Henry IV. Given that quartering was reserved for those convicted of attacking members of the royal family, it was only ever applied twice throughout France in the two centuries prior to the Revolution. Indeed, historians are aware of only twelve examples of its use in Europe as a whole since classical Roman times. Consequently, this penalty was by no means a typical example of early modern justice. Much more common, and almost as excruciating for the victim, was the last mode of capital punishment to be reviewed: breaking on the wheel.

Up to the turn of the eighteenth century, breaking on the wheel was second only to hanging as the most common form of execution in early modern Europe. It was introduced into France in the early sixteenth century, and continued to be applied, albeit with decreasing frequency, up to its abolition in 1788. An example from seventeenth-century Paris illustrates the procedure.

In 1665, two brothers named Touchet were brought to a scaffold at the Pont-Neuf where they were to be executed for the murders of the city's police lieutenant and his wife. Each man was stripped of his clothing and tied face-up to a large x-shaped horizontal cross. Then, using a heavy metal bar, the executioner proceeded in a systematic fashion to break the limbs of both men before smashing their rib-cages with several further blows. He and his assistants then bound the broken but still living bodies to two large cart-wheels where they were left to die. The executioner had to remain at the scene until his victims expired. So when, nine hours later, he saw that the Touchets were clinging stubbornly to life, he strangled them both.

A century later, this same process was used in the execution of a Huguenot from Toulouse named Jean Calas, convicted of the murder of his son. In his case, only two hours were allowed to elapse between being

lashed to the wheel and his final despatch.

Although by the eighteenth century hanging was the preferred sentence for capital offences meted out by French courts, convicted criminals were still condemned to be broken on the wheel in small but significant numbers. For instance, in 1787 alone, the *parlement* of Paris confirmed eleven sentences of execution by breaking on the wheel, compared to thirty-two hangings. Given that breaking on the wheel took place throughout France, it is likely that hundreds more suffered this penalty over the course of the eighteenth century, with their deaths watched by many thousands of citizens.

Historians of the period have developed various theories to explain the employment of public displays of torture and death, not just in France, but throughout early modern Europe. These can be categorised into two main schools of thought, not mutually exclusive, but indicative of either a secular or a religious emphasis.

The secular scenario can be explained as follows. Although France, unlike most other European countries, had a police force (known as the *Maréchaussée*), it was not resourced sufficiently to deal with the level of crime then prevalent. Violence in particular was endemic and many assaults, for instance, never came to the attention of the authorities. The only possible deterrent available to the state was to demonstrate its power over those whom it did manage to bring to justice. In the case of capital offences, it did this by staging executions as public rituals in order to impress upon the masses that, however unlikely it was that criminals would be prosecuted, when they were the outcome would be hideous for them. Consequently citizens were encouraged to view these spectacles in order to deter them from crime. As Foucault asserted, 'The public execution did not re-establish justice; it reactivated power'.[154]

This secular perspective is complemented by a religious theory that draws upon France's medieval Christian heritage, a heritage that remained alive up to the Revolution. According to this theory, the state was as much concerned with punishing sin as it was in prosecuting civil crime. Indeed, blasphemy and sacrilege were offences for which the perpetrators could be mutilated or executed. In 1766, for instance, the young Jean François Lefèvre, chevalier de La Barre, was decapitated in Picardy for having defiled a crucifix.

Some historians have argued that public executions such as this represented a type of 'passion play' in which the possibilities of atonement and redemption were enacted before the crowd. The convicted prisoner was encouraged to admit his guilt and to seek forgiveness, thereby ensuring his eternal salvation once the executioner had completed his task. A priest was close at hand to encourage any last-minute repentance

[154] Ibid, p. 58.

and acknowledgement of sin by the prisoner. This underlined the Church's teaching that acceptance of suffering was a means of imitating Christ and thereby contributing to the redemption of mankind. Consequently, if a condemned man was seen to have expressed remorse on the scaffold, he was associated with the 'good thief' whom Jesus forgave on Calvary. As a proponent of this line of reasoning has written:

> The image of each penitent sinner could enter, in the mind's eye, into a macrocosmic economy of pain, a community of suffering anxiously geared towards redemption. The reeking gallows, splashed with the potent blood of martyrs, was its cult station, and the demolished body of the criminal its living cult image.[155]

But what did ordinary people think of the way society punished capital crimes, particularly those who witnessed executions or who heard about them later? Unfortunately, perhaps due to a dearth of source material, historians have not managed to come up with a satisfactory answer to that question. Instead historical attention has tended to focus on the writings of those eighteenth-century writers, such as Montesquieu, Beccaria, and especially Voltaire, who campaigned against the perceived injustices of the *ancien regime* criminal justice system. The clear implication conveyed in the historiography is that key Enlightenment figures created a new per-spective that ultimately led to a change of thinking by both state and citizen.

One scholar underlined this argument by quoting approvingly this passage from Paul Hazard's 1935 work, *The Crisis of the European Mind, 1680 -1715.*

> "One day the majority of the French people were thinking like [Bishop Jean-Bénigne] Bossuet [chaplain to Louis XIV], then suddenly in a flash they were thinking like Voltaire: it was a revolution."[156]

Up to this point, according to another view, the ever-present reminders of death in the lives of ordinary people through famine, child mortality, etc., had contributed to a normalisation of the use of public torture and execution. In the words of yet another scholar, people were living in 'the era of humanitarianism's prehistory'.[157]

This historiographical case can be summarised as follows: through a combination of religious indoctrination and cultural desensitisation, the generality of the population in *ancien regime* France accepted a penal system, the inherent barbarism of which was revealed only through the writings of the eighteenth-century philosophes.

Was it really because of enlightened thinking by a few visionaries that

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[155] Mitchell B. Merback, *The thief, the cross, and the wheel: pain and the spectacle of punishment in medieval and Renaissance Europe* (London, 1999), p. 157.
[156] Philip F. Riley, *A lust for virtue: Louis XIV's attack on sin in seventeenth-century France* (Westport, Conn., 2001), p. 170.
[157] Merback, *The thief, the cross, and the wheel*, p. 157.

humanity was finally able to break free from the grip of medieval superstition and enter a more civilised state of being? Was my colleague correct in his judgement of the pre-modern mentality? Had the minds of the people become coarsened and corrupted, reflecting society's preoccupation with sin and punishment?

I do not believe so.

There are clues in the historical record to indicate that the officially-sanctioned public slaughter of human beings was capable of provoking abhorrence or empathy long before Enlightenment thinking on the subject became a cultural imperative. A woodcut printed in Paris in 1541 entitled *Execution in a Crowded Square*, depicts a number of different types of execution being carried out before a large crowd. At the bottom of the picture, in the foreground, the artist included an image of a boy struggling to leave the throng with an expression that illustrates his distress at what he has witnessed.[158]

Perhaps the artist intended to convey the inhumanity of the scene through the reaction of this young observer. If so, his view was endorsed several decades later by a French writer, Michel de Montaigne, in his 1580 essay *Cowardice, mother of cruelty*. In it Montaigne articulated more directly the simple humanitarianism only suggested in the woodcut:

> All that is beyond plain death seems to me pure cruelty. Our justice cannot hope that the man who will not be deterred from doing wrong by the fear of dying on the block or the gallows will be prevented by the idea of a slow fire, or pincers, or the wheel.[159]

In 1682, the president of the Dijon *parlement* echoed these sentiments when he wrote, 'I frankly confess that I am one of those who would prefer a speedy death to such intolerable sufferings (as torture)…'[160] Even a hardened executioner like Gabriel Sanson was not inured to the more extreme forms of capital punishment he was called upon to inflict. According to family records, Sanson became so overwrought at the prospect of carrying out Damiens' sentence that he could not proceed and one of his assistants was bribed to take over. Sanson never recovered from the experience and resigned soon afterwards. The differing attitudes of the crowd are revealed in an account of the same event by the famous libertine, Giacomo Casanova. He admitted that he 'was several times obliged to turn away my face and to stop my ears as I heard (Damiens') piercing shrieks'. Yet his companions remained unmoved due to 'their horror at the wretch's wickedness (in attacking the king)'.[161] These contrasting

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158 Ibid, p. 143.

159 Donald M. Frame (ed.), *The complete essays of Montaigne* (Stanford, 1958), p. 530.

160 Adhémar Esmein, *A history of continental criminal procedure: with special reference to France* (Boston, 1913), p. 355.

161 Jacques Casanova De Seingalt, *The Memoirs of Casanova Volume 3 of 6: The Eternal Quest*, Arthur Machen, trans. (Teddington, 2007), p. 18.

reactions reveal the complexity of the crowd who witnessed such events: some were horrified, others felt vengeful.

Further evidence of the divergent responses of onlookers can be found in an account of a more common form of capital punishment. In *Les Nuits de Paris* published in 1788, the author Rétif de la Bretonne described a scene of execution he chanced upon at the Place de Grève. Three men were being broken on the wheel, but Rétif's attention was on the crowd who "chattered and laughed as if they were watching a farce". Then he spotted a "young girl, drenched in tears", who approached him when she saw that he too "feels pity for those in anguish".[162]

As Rétif de la Bretonne's narrative indicates, the majority of those who chose to attend such set-piece executions probably derived some satisfaction if not pleasure from what took place. However, what about those who stayed away from these spectacles, or who were deeply disturbed by what they saw if their curiosity got the better of them?

The examples offered above, from the boy fleeing the carnage of the public square to the girl weeping at the inhumanity of the wheel, show that early modern sensibilities included compassion and revulsion at another person's suffering. The fact that capital offences were punished in a manner unheard of today, at least in the western world, should not be interpreted as a sign that those who made up society then were any different to their modern counterparts. Just because criminals are no longer executed publicly does not mean that the callous impulses evident in the crowd described by Rétif de la Bretonne have disappeared.

In March 2012, a newspaper report described how passers-by paused to film a woman's dismembered body following a road accident in Manchester. Footage of the dead woman's severed leg was later posted on Twitter. Other witnesses condemned as "revolting" the behaviour of these "ghouls".[163]

An example like this suggests that those who thronged the Place de Grève on execution day did *not* represent a bloodthirsty aspect of the human condition long since rendered extinct.

The continuation up to the eve of the Revolution of what are now regarded in civilised society as barbaric methods of capital punishment raises fundamental questions about the nature of the *ancien regime* and its people. In attempting to address these, historians have dwelt on the twin influences of a powerful state concerned with cementing its power and a Church founded on a creed of suffering and redemption. While both schools of thought go a long way towards explaining the persistence of these modes of execution, they also create a false perception that the

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[162] Robert Forster, (ed.), *European society in the eighteenth century* (London, 1969), pp 386-9.

[163] *Irish Independent*, 30 Mar. 2012.

people of pre-Revolution France were somehow lacking in the basic humanitarian instincts we take for granted today. That this was not the case is clear from the evidence presented here.

Early modern men and women were just as capable as their modern counterparts of recognising cruelty for what it was. The fact that criminals were put to death in an abhorrent manner was not due to the inhumanity of contemporary society. On the contrary, it was a reflection of the tenacious grip exercised by secular and religious power structures over the state and its people. Following the revolution of 1789, these power structures were forced to submit to the kinds of fundamental change they had resisted for so long.

WHAT ABOUT SEX? HIGHWAY TO HELL OR GATEWAY TO HEAVEN?

First published: 11 Sep 2021

What is sex, in the sense of sexual intercourse between two people? Is it a biological function through which the human species reproduces itself? Is it a pleasurable pastime engaged in by consenting adults? Is it an act of genital intimacy restricted to married couples by moral and religious rules? Or is it much more than any of these?

Could there be a mystical or even sacred dimension to sex that has been largely forgotten or overlooked in our modern world? Could it be that sexual longing, sexual ecstasy, has the potential to bring us closer to God?

Growing up as I did in the Ireland of the 1950s and 60s, I learnt early on that sex in virtually all its manifestations was frowned upon by society in general and the Roman Catholic Church in particular. There was one exception to the otherwise negative outlook on sexual activity. That was the marital bed. Indeed procreative sex was encouraged and both medical and religious authorities promoted frequent childbearing, even if it put the mother's health at risk.[164]

It was only later that I learnt of a Catholic angle on sex that was not condemnatory; quite the opposite in fact. This perspective was to be found in the poetry of St. John of the Cross, in the autobiographical writings of his contemporary, St. Teresa of Ávila and, most spectacularly, in the Bible itself – the Song of Songs to be precise. Not only did these sources not reject sex as a shameful and sinful act, they portrayed it as a kind of gateway to God.[165]

So when I studied the history of early Christianity I decided to focus on the origins of the Church's perspective on sex. I wanted to see if, and how, its two quite different attitudes to sex, the censorious and the celebratory, could be reconciled. This led me to an interesting man named Origen and the result was an essay I wrote in 2012.

I have trimmed and edited it to make it more readable for a general audience.

* * *

There is general agreement that the Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon as it also known) was considered part of the Hebrew Bible by the Jews, perhaps from the second century BC. Its place in the canon was confirmed in the 1st century AD when a leading rabbi is said to have described it as 'the

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164 Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin*, pp 299-301.

165 See 1) "Song of the soul in intimate and communication with the love of God" in Roy Campbell (tr.), *The Poems of St. John of the Cross* (Glasgow 1983), pp 28-9, and 2) E. Allison Peers, (tr.), *The complete works of Saint Teresa of Jesus* (3 vols., London 1946), i, pp 192-3.

holiest of the holy'.[166] The early Christian Church decided in the 2nd century to accept the entire Hebrew canon rather than risk dissension over individual books. However the process by which an ostensibly secular text celebrating the joys of love-making was incorporated into sacred scripture at all is a question that has confounded scholars.

The preamble to the Song, in which authorship is attributed to King Solomon, is considered to have been a factor, and the book is placed just after Solomon's other supposed compositions, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Another theory is that the text may have been interpreted allegorically rather than literally by the compilers, and this would have made it acceptable to both Jews and Christians as a legitimate aspect of divine revelation. Whatever about the role of allegory in determining the Song's biblical status, it became central to Christian understanding of the text right up to the modern era. Primary responsibility for this allegorical reading of the Song of Songs lies with a 3rd-century theologian and philosopher named Origen.

The precise details of Origen's birth are uncertain, but he was probably born in Alexandria in Egypt around 185 AD. Alexandria was an important centre of Greek philosophical learning, and was home also to a vibrant Christian community of which Origen's family were members. This cultural mix is reflected in the diversity of Origen's education - his teachers included Ammonius Saccas, a renowned Platonist, as well as an unknown 'Hebrew Master' with whom Origen studied the Old Testament. Notwithstanding his eclectic background, Origen's commitment to Christianity ran deep and he became a celebrated teacher and theologian, travelling around the eastern Mediterranean in response to requests for instruction from his co-religionists. He ended his days in what is now the Lebanon, where he died at the age of about 70.[167]

Origen wrote the 10 books of his Commentary on the Song of Songs over a number of years, starting in 240 AD.[168] However, the prologue and the first three books alone survive, and even those are available only in a Latin translation made by Tyrannius Rufinus, a fourth-century theologian. Sadly, the original text of Origen's two Homilies on the Song of Songs, written shortly after the Commentary, is also lost. What we have instead is

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[166] Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1990), p. 1, fn.1. Marvin H. Pope, *Song of songs: a new translation with introduction and commentary* (New Haven, Conn., 2007), pp 18-9. Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs: a commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis, 1990), pp 5-6.

[167] John A. McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville, Ky., 2004), pp 1-24.

[168] There was no single authoritative version of the Song of Songs available to Origen. According to Jerome, Origen drew upon several sources, including the Septuagint and the Alexandrian Greek version of the Hebrew scriptures which dates from 250 BC (see Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, trans. R.P. Lawson (London, 1957), fn. 3, p. 359).

a Latin translation made by Jerome, who was a contemporary of Rufinus. Notwithstanding these gaps in the sources, the translations of both Rufinus and Jerome are deemed by modern scholars to 'provide us a sound apparatus for interpreting this most original interpreter of the Song' and present to the reader 'the genuine Origen'.[169]

In his writings on the subject, Origen constructed an allegorical interpretation of the biblical text in which the erotic interplay of the two lovers was transformed into a meditation on the human relationship with the divine. Origen did not invent this form of interpretation. Greek philosophers such as Plato used allegory to disguise the coarse behaviour of the gods as described in the writings of Homer. However, Origen's is the earliest surviving allegorical reading of the Song of Songs and the most influential in terms of subsequent Christian interpretations.

For modern commentators, who almost unanimously read the Song as 'an unequivocal celebration of male-female sexual love', allegorists such as Origen employed their exegetical skills to 'unsex… a ticking time bomb within Scripture itself, an occasion for sin just waiting to happen'.[170] In other words, Origen and his successors are accused of having engaged in mental gymnastics in order to render 'safe' for its readers a plainly salacious text.

Origen's own writings offer some support for this view. However, they also reveal that his perspective on the Song of Songs and on the role of human sexuality was more complex than a cursory reading might suggest.

The ideal of virginity was held in high regard within the eastern Mediterranean cultures from which Christianity developed. Zealous members of the new religion, like Origen, adopted this concept of lifelong celibacy, seeing it as 'the mark of exceptional closeness to the Spirit of God'.[171] On the other hand, Origen was well aware of the so-called 'temptations of the flesh'. In his Homily on Genesis, he warned of the dangers faced by the celibate male: '… some women, for we do not censure all equally, but there are some who serve passion incessantly, like animals without any distinction, whom I would not even compare to the dumb beasts'.[172] Given this apprehension about 'occasions of sin', why did Origen devote so much attention to a text featuring an assertive female who addresses her male lover with a plea to 'Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth'? Was he,

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[169] J. Christopher King, *Origen on the Song of Songs as the Spirit of Scripture* (Oxford, 2005), p. 13. F. Barth, 'Prediger und Zuhorer im Zeitalter des Origenes', *Aus Schrift und Geschichte, Festyschrift fur Orelli* cited in Lawson, p. 6.

[170] Stephen D. Moore, 'The Song of Songs in the History of Sexuality', *Church History*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (Jun., 2000), pp. 328-49.

[171] Peter Brown, *The body and society: men, women and sexual renunciation in early Christianity* (New York, 1988), p. 66.

[172] Origen, 'Homily V on Genesis', in *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, ed. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, 1982), p. 117.

as the scholar quoted above claimed, attempting to 'unsex' the Song of Songs through allegory lest a literal reading lead its readers into unchaste thoughts?

To be sure, Origen anticipated this possibility. In his prologue to the Commentary, he warned anyone who had 'not ceased to feel the passion of his bodily nature' to keep away from both the Song itself and the Commentary.[173] However, for those who had undergone a process of training and purification, it was possible to appreciate what Origen described as the 'secret metaphors of love' contained in the Song of Songs.[174] Clearly Origen was aiming his treatise at the select few who could penetrate the true meaning of the text.

For Origen, there were two types of Christian: the masses who could accept only literal teachings, and the smaller number of initiates who were capable of understanding certain 'mystical doctrines' hidden from the rest. Origen distinguished between exoteric and esoteric truths, the latter communicated privately only to those ready to receive them.

He offered the example of Pythagoras, who 'taught in secret those doctrines which were not deemed fit to be communicated to profane and insufficiently prepared ears'.[175] Referring to Mark 4:34, Origen pointed out that Jesus also was said to have 'conversed with His disciples in private' in terms that were not suitable for the generality of people, and consequently these teachings had not been preserved.[176] It was to a like-minded and specially-trained 'inner circle' of Christians that Origen revealed what he perceived as the true meaning and purpose of the Song. In doing so did he, as those scholars cited above have asserted, employ allegory to de-eroticise the text? Or is it the case, as another writer has suggested, that this exegetical method 'cannot adequately be explained as an exercise in pathological rejection of human sexuality'?[177]

It is evident from a reading of the Prologue to his Commentary, that the charge levelled against Origen of 'unsexing' the Song of Songs is misplaced. Far from playing down the erotic content of the Song, he actually revealed it more clearly. For instance, he pointed out that mild words like 'charity' and 'affection' were used in the text of the Song to signify the intense feelings of the woman towards her beloved. This, he argued, was 'to avoid the danger of the mention of love becoming an occasion of falling for its readers'. Origen then paraphrased a passage in which the woman exclaimed that she had 'been wounded by charity', rendering it as 'I have

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[173] Origen, Commentary: Prologue, in Lawson, p. 23.
[174] Ibid, p. 44.
[175] 'Origen against Celsus', Book I, Ch. VII, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: the writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, eds Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, Mass., 1995) iv, 399.
[176] Ibid, iv, 575.
[177] Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, p. 16.

been smitten through with the dart of his "passionate love"'.[178] This more highly charged language reflected a certain insight on Origen's part into the nature of female sexual longing. Another example of this is to be found later in the Prologue when he described a woman 'whose whole heart and soul and strength are on fire with passionate love' for the object of her desire. For Origen, such an intensity of erotic feeling was perfectly natural:

> Everyone who has reached the age that they call puberty loves something, either less rightly when he loves what he should not, or rightly and with profit when he loves what he should love.[179]

In writing about the Song of Songs, Origen does not seem to have been trying to persuade his readers to suppress their sexual urges. Instead he wanted them to redirect those feelings towards God. As one scholar has written, Origen believed that 'physical pleasure was a stale and bland displacement of true feeling'. He viewed the world as a pale reflection of divine reality and it was only 'the numbness of their spirits' that prevented more people from perceiving the 'sensuous delight' of the 'spiritual realm'.[180] On the other hand, as Origen himself wrote, 'he who has reached the peak of perfection will be delighted by the Word of God in all his senses'. Origen's focus on the full sensory experience awaiting the spiritually advanced illustrates his understanding of the 'divine meaning' behind the erotic language of the Song.[181] Clearly he saw that meaning as more real, not less, than the joys to be found in physical love-making. As to exactly what Origen understood to be the 'divine meaning', we have a few brief glimpses.

On those rare occasions when he left allegory behind and wrote in the first person, Origen revealed a little of what the "secret metaphors of love" meant to him. For instance, in his First Homily he echoed the female protagonist's longing with a plea that he too would one day "be able to say what is written in this same book: 'His left hand is under my head, and His right hand will embrace me'".[182] Further on, he described how he had "often perceived the Bridegroom (God) drawing near me and being most intensely present with me; then suddenly He has withdrawn and I could not find Him".[183]

A modern commentator on Origen's philosophy has referred to the Alexandrian's belief in the "cosmic ascent of the soul", a process that leads ultimately to the soul's unification with God. According to this interpretation, the process is "symbolised by the marital eros of the bride and

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[178] Origen, Commentary: Prologue, in Lawson, pp 30-2.
[179] Ibid, pp 36-7.
[180] Brown, *The body and society*, pp 172-3.
[181] Origen, Commentary: Book 1, in Lawson, p 79.
[182] Origen, First Homily, in ibid., pp 270-1.
[183] Ibid, p. 280.

bridegroom in the Song of Songs".[184] In his First Homily, Origen appeared to be signalling his own stage on that journey to the summit of ecstatic union with God, a journey he had yet to finish. In pursuit of his ultimate goal Origen had redirected rather than repressed his sexuality, using the sensual language of the Song of Songs as his 'roadmap'. By interpreting that 'roadmap' allegorically he hoped to guide those of his readers who were capable of making the same "cosmic ascent" upon which he had embarked.

It is incorrect to regard Origen simply as a sexually-inhibited celibate who sought to detoxify a sacred text of its dangerous erotic content. On the contrary, Origen appreciated the potency of the sexual drive and saw it as the means by which the Christian mystic could embrace and be embraced by God. For him, the Song of Songs could lead those few, who had been shown the true meaning of sacred teaching, to the culmination of their spiritual quest.

Origen regarded celibacy, not as a means of rejecting his erotic feelings, but as a way of redirecting them toward the divine. This belief, while largely incomprehensible to the modern mind, points to the subtlety of Origen's understanding of sexuality.

[184] Alan G. Paddle, 'Mystical Thought', in McGuckin, *Westminster Handbook*, pp 154-8.

THIS ISLAND EARTH (PART 1): A PLACE OR STATE?

First published: 25 September 2021

Recently someone sent out a tweet after reading a newspaper article that upset them. The article in question speculated that, despite a "very high Covid-19 vaccine uptake", new restrictions might be imposed on Ireland over the winter. This prospect had clearly pushed the Twitter user (tweeter?) to her wit's end.

> Ffs I can't cope with much more of this. It's not living it's hell so much for the so called magic vaccine.[185]

The tweet is by no means unique. Over the last few months I have seen others in a similar vein. They reflect a growing feeling that what we once knew as 'living' is now being turned into a 'hell' by the official response to Covid-19. In a previous post I referred to:

> the would-be tyrants and despots who, but for the lack of means, would have long ago transformed our already bleak world into another hell.[186]

Is this what we see happening around us? Is our world being transformed "into another hell"? Or is it more accurate to describe what is happening as a veil being lifted to reveal what was there all along, i.e. that hell is not some half-forgotten fantasy used to frighten us, but a terrible reality slowly becoming apparent here and now, like a monstrous, previously invisible, hulk looming out of the fog?

This is not quite the image of hell presented by orthodox religion. The Roman Catholic position is encapsulated in the catechism authorised in 2005 by Pope Benedict XVI.

> In what does hell consist?
>
> Hell consists in the eternal damnation of those who die in mortal sin through their own free choice.[187]

While this brief definition contains several interesting features, one in particular is worth noting: hell relates to the next life, i.e. after we die. The same emphasis can be seen in this extract from the pre-Vatican Council catechism I used in school.

> What is hell?
>
> Hell is a place or state of punishment in the next life, where the wicked undergo everlasting suffering with the Devil and his angels.[188]

The language may be different but the doctrine is the same. Hell exists alright – but the prospect arises following our physical death here on Earth.

Those who reject the idea of God or an afterlife can easily ignore the

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[185] Erin Stephanie, Twitter post, 5:33 PM · 14 Sep. 2021.
[186] The ruler of this world: Time to go? on page 143.
[187] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [https://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium_ccc/documents/archive_2005_compendium-ccc_en.html], 2 Sep 2021.
[188] *Catechism* (1951), p. 47.

concept of hell completely. Even those who believe may be tempted to put hell on the long finger and concentrate on the here and now of this world. That is perhaps easier today than in, say, James Joyce's time when, as he described in his writings, Catholics were reminded regularly in the confession box or from the pulpit of what awaited them after death if they did not mend their ways.[189] So is hell really nothing to worry about, for now anyway?

In late-1992 I spent a short time working in the city of Lublin in eastern Poland. With a few hours to kill one day I decided to visit the site of a nearby Nazi concentration camp called Majdanek. It was a cold and gloomy November afternoon when the taxi dropped me at the entrance.

The camp had been preserved by the Soviets when the War ended. I could see lots of small wooden huts behind the tall barbed wire fence that marked the lengthy perimeter. It was not difficult to imagine how this place must have looked a half-century earlier. Majdanek was set up in 1941 to hold prisoners-of-war, mainly Russians. Later on the camp was expanded to imprison Jews from Poland and other Nazi-occupied territories. It is estimated that about 80,000 inmates lost their lives in Majdanek.[190]

No one else was around on the day of my visit. A light snow began to fall as I walked towards a stone building with a tall chimney I could see in the distance. When I arrived I found the door unlocked. As I went in, my legs suddenly went from under me and I fell down. It was as if some invisible force had compelled me to drop to the floor. When I got back to my feet and continued inside I realised I was in the crematorium. Here were the ovens used to burn the bodies of the dead. I also saw a dissection table and a huge heap of shoes and other personal paraphernalia. It was a ghastly place.

Those who worked in this hideous camp, the soldiers, the guards, the orderlies, could hardly have been oblivious to the evil system around them, a system to which they were contributing passively if not actively.[191] It was not only the prospect of beating or execution the prisoners had to worry about. Surviving on the meagre rations of watery soup and bread was a daily struggle. One inmate, Józef Szczygiel, recalled that:

> The chunk of bread to last us the whole day could not have been more than 200 grams. Cut into two, it gave two quite thin slices.[192]

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[189] Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist*, pp. 97-103.

[190] *State Museum at Majdanek* [http://www.majdanek.eu/en/history/general_information/1], 20 Sep 2021.

[191] After the war, more than 130 "functionaries" of Majdanek were prosecuted by the Allies. A few were executed, others received lengthy prison sentences. (see Czeslaw Rajca & Anna Wusniewska, tr. Anna Zagorska, *Majdanek Concentration Camp* (Lublin 1983), pp. 37-9.)

[192] Rajca & Wusniewska, *Majdanek*, pp. 61-2.

Majdanek was not a nice place to find yourself in. But what about somewhere less obviously inhuman, like a hospital where the staff are supposed to help those in their care?

In an essay entitled, "How the Poor Die", George Orwell, author of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, related his experience of being a patient in a French hospital. He set the scene in his first sentence:

> In the year 1929 I spent several weeks in the Hôpital X, in the fifteenth arrondissement of Paris.[193]

Orwell described the sights, sounds, and smells he observed around him during his time in a large public ward. There, he and the other patients were prodded, jabbed, and manhandled as if they were inanimate slabs of meat rather than sentient human beings. He wrote of one unfortunate in the next bed who had just died. His "eyes were still open, his mouth also open, his small face contorted into an expression of agony". He also described how the staff wrapped up the body before it was taken away like a "disgusting piece of refuse".[194]

It was not that the doctors and nurses were psychopaths who delighted in tormenting their patients. But whatever it was about the culture in which they lived and worked, the staff did not regard those in their care as people like them deserving of love and respect. Orwell felt "humiliated, disgusted and frightened" by the treatment he received there.[195]

Could there be two more apt cases than these of "hell on earth"? Yes of course; they are only examples after all. There are countless others throughout history, such as Ireland during the Great Famine of the 1840s, the slave plantations in the southern United States, or the Jonestown settlement in Guyana where almost 1,000 cult members killed themselves and their children in 1978.

What all of these have in common is their existence in this world, this life – not the next. But terrible as they were, are these not extreme cases concentrated in specific places at specific times? Can they be compared to the present crisis overtaking the whole world? Yes, if we take them as evidence of our propensity as humans to create our own hell - as we are doing right now. Except that our present plight is not centred in one place, it is everywhere - right across our entire planet Earth.

So are we actually in hell? Is that the reality gradually unfolding before our eyes? Or is it closer to the truth to suggest that hell is in us? If so, wouldn't it be easier to fix? My old catechism defined hell as "a place or *state*". A state of mind perhaps?

I will examine this question further in Part 2.

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193 George Orwell, *Selected Essays* (Oxford, 2021), p. 250.
194 Ibid, p. 254.
195 Ibid, p. 251.

THIS ISLAND EARTH (PART 2): "EACH INDIVIDUAL IS HIS OWN DEVIL, AND HIMSELF MAKES THE WORLD A HELL." (OSCAR WILDE)

First published: 09 October 2021

For some people the hell-on-Earth I wrote about in Part 1 is not confined to a specific place and time, like 1840s rural Ireland or 1940s Majdanek. For them hell is a state of mind, a way of seeing the world that induces a sense of helplessness in the face of some unyielding power.

Nowadays we would probably view such a mental state as having a mundane or maybe a medical basis, like innate pessimism or some kind of psychiatric ailment. One might even attach a label to it, 'anomie' or 'existential angst' for instance. I prefer the term 'hell', and not just because of my religious upbringing. French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80), was an "avowed" atheist - and he believed in hell, although not necessarily the traditional definition discussed in Part 1.[196]

In his 1944 play *Huis clos* ("No Exit"), Sartre presents us with three characters thrown together in a hellish afterlife. But this netherworld is not quite what they expected. Their new quarters are pretty comfortable – there is even electric light!

> So this is hell. I'd never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the "burning marl." Old wives' tales! There's no need for red-hot pokers. Hell is—other people![197]

For Sartre, it was not just the tiresome company of uncongenial people that bothered him. He hated the idea of being subject to the bad opinion of others. He saw their judgment of him as a kind of imprisonment. To have to endure that forever would be the epitome of hell. As he wrote in *Being and Nothingness*, there is only one way for a fallible human to avoid this awful fate:

> He must constantly put himself beyond reach in order to avoid the terrible judgment of collectivity.[198]

But later on in the same work, he seemed to identify a problem with that option too.

> I am abandoned in the world, not in the sense that I might remain abandoned and passive in a hostile universe like a board floating on the water, but rather in the sense that I find myself suddenly alone and without help, engaged in a world for which I bear the whole responsibility without being able, whatever I do, to tear myself away from this responsibility for an instant.[199]

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196 Jonathan Webber, *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York, 2009), p. 143.
197 Jean-Paul Sartre, *No exit, and three other plays*, tr. S. Gilbert & L. Abel (New York 1955), pp. 46-7.
198 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and nothingness; an essay on phenomenological ontology*, tr. Hazel E. Barnes (New York, 1956), p. 64.
199 Ibid, pp. 555-6.

During World War II Sartre lived in Nazi-occupied Paris. Although his account of that experience is quite brilliant, it also reveals the sense of impotence I detect at the heart of Sartre's philosophy.

> The occupation had stripped people of their future. We no longer followed a couple with our eyes while trying to imagine their destiny: we had no more destiny than a nail or a doorknob.[200]

Another who lived with the feeling of being subject to some force outside himself was Russian composer, Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893). The external appearances of his life were those of a popular and successful public figure living in the latter part of the 19th century. According to his younger brother, Modeste, by 1887 Tchaikovsky had:

> Realised his wildest dreams of fame, and attained to such prosperity and universal honour as rarely fall to the lot of an artist during his lifetime.[201]

Yet as Modeste also pointed out, beneath the surface, this feted composer was deeply unhappy.

All his life Tchaikovsky was convinced that his life and work were at the mercy of what he called "the jester Fate".[202] In a letter written in March 1878 to his patroness, Nadezhda von Meck, he outlined the thinking behind the opening bars of his fourth symphony:

> This is Fate, that inevitable force which checks our aspirations towards happiness ere they reach the goal, which watches jealously lest our peace and bliss should be complete and cloudless – a force which, like the sword of Damocles, hangs perpetually over our heads and is always embittering the soul. This force is inescapable and invincible. There is no other course but to submit and inwardly lament.[203]

Fifteen years later, on 28 October 1893, Tchaikovsky conducted the world première of his Symphony No. 6, known as the *Pathétique*, in St. Petersburg. Within nine days the composer was dead at the age of 53, ostensibly of cholera but speculation persists that Tchaikovsky committed suicide.

The *Pathétique* symphony is a work like no other in the composer's extensive catalogue. Musicologist and Tchaikovsky specialist, David Brown, described it as "surely the most truly original symphony to have been composed since Beethoven's Ninth".[204] Unusually for such a self-critical artist, Tchaikovsky himself thought highly of the work. He told his nephew he believed it

> to be the best and in particular the 'most sincere' of all my works. I love it

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[200] Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Paris Under the Occupation', *Sartre Studies International*, 4/2 (1998), p. 8.
[201] Modeste Tchaikovsky, *The life & letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky*, tr./ed. Rosa Newmarch (London, 1906), p. 539.
[202] Ibid, p. 168.
[203] Ibid, pp. 275-6.
[204] David Brown, *Tchaikovsky: The Man and his Music* (New York, 2007), p. 423.

> as I have never loved a single one of my other musical creations.[205]

While the expected elements of rhythm, melody and sumptuous orchestration are to be found in the first three movements, for Brown it is the "stunningly original" fourth movement that puts the *Pathétique* in a class of its own.

> Not a conventional vigorous finale, but a most pain-filled, tragic utterance… with an ending that suggests not resignation, but only oblivion.[206]

In the case of both Sartre and Tchaikovsky, it could be argued that the persistent fatalism I find in their work was shaped by traumas in their early lives. In Sartre's case the death of his father when he was only two left an indelible mark. Of course Sartre never knew his father but clearly felt the loss of such a figure as his childhood progressed. In his autobiographical musings, Sartre wrote, "If my father were alive, I would know my rights and duties. He is dead, and I am unaware of them."[207] One of Sartre's biographers put it this way:

> Deprived of a father, he is also deprived of a destiny. A father would at least have given him something to revolt against. But burdensome as it may be, the Father's law at least keeps the son anchored in reality.[208]

Tchaikovsky also lost a parent in childhood. His mother, who we are told was "the most important woman in his whole existence", died when he was 14. As with Sartre, this seems to have had a lasting effect on Tchaikovsky.

> To the end of his life each anniversary of her death brought a flood of treasured memories and painful emotions.[209]

Is child father to the man? Would Sartre and Tchaikovsky have felt happier inside if they had not suffered those terrible losses during their formative years? If so, perhaps neither man would have turned out to be as creative as he was. But that is a discussion for another day. Another question demands our attention now.

Are these childhood experiences behind the feeling of abandonment described by Sartre, or the oblivion that seems to have finally overtaken Tchaikovsky? Or is something else at work here? Did Oscar Wilde get it right when he wrote the words at the top of this piece?[210]

To put it another way, is what we read in Sartre's writings and hear in Tchaikovsky's music not merely the signs of troubled genius sparked by trauma, but perceptible evidence that here are two souls lost in a self-made hell from which they can find no exit?

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[205] Alexander Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky: The quest for the inner man* (New York, 1991), pp. 567-8.
[206] Brown, *Tchaikovsky*, p. 422.
[207] Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Words*, tr. Bernard Frechtman (New York, 1964), p. 32.
[208] Andrew Leak, *Jean-Paul Sartre* (London 2006), p. 11.
[209] Brown, *Tchaikovsky*, p. 4.
[210] Oscar Wilde, *The Duchess of Padua* (New York, 1906), p. 112.

THIS ISLAND EARTH (PART 3): LET'S UNPAVE PARADISE.

First published: 06 November 2021

Everything man-made begins with a thought or an idea. Everything. Whether it is a car, a pop song, or a concentration camp, it starts with a germ of an idea in someone's mind. Take Majdanek for instance.

This concentration camp built outside the town of Lublin was by no means the first of its kind, nor did the Nazis originate the idea of incarcerating civilians en masse. The concept was already decades old when they came to power in Germany in the 1930s. Having implemented it in their home country, the Nazis extended it into the territories they conquered, like Poland.

The idea of corralling people together in a concentrated space, without proper judicial process, was first mooted in 1895 during the Cuban war of independence and implemented there by the Spanish overlords a year later.[211] Whoever came up with the idea should have patented it because the concentration camp has never gone out of fashion. Probably its best-known manifestation today is at Guantánamo Bay, interestingly also in Cuba.

The concentration camp is not the only concept that, when made tangible, edges our world closer to darkness. The hand-gun and the hydrogen bomb are obvious other examples. But what about less clearcut cases like the internal combustion engine, the computer (upon which I am typing these words), or the mousetrap? Clearly these have benefited mankind, haven't they?

Admittedly it is difficult to find much that is positive about the mousetrap but at the very least this device reassures householders worried about their homes being invaded by disease-carrying rodents. The development of the internal combustion engine led to faster and more comfortable transport, like cars and planes. These have opened up the world to ordinary folk whose horizons would otherwise be very restricted. When combined with the Internet, the computer has taken the drudgery out of research and made it possible to communicate over long distances, cheaply and quickly. But there are downsides.

Many thousands of people have been killed or maimed by the car. According to one source, the total number of motor traffic fatalities in the USA during the 20th century is 3.2m.[212] When computers are dumped for so-called recycling (usually in poorer parts of the world), the lead and other toxic substances inside them pollute the earth and poison the local

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[211] Andrea Pitzer, *One Long Night: A Global History of Concentration Camps* (New York, 2017).

[212] Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities & Fatality Rate: 1899 - 2003 [https://web.archive.org/web/20110921222129/http://www.saferoads.org/federal/2004/TrafficFatalities1899-2003.pdf], 3 Nov 2021.

inhabitants.[213] And the mousetrap usually kills its victims.

Thinking about these examples prompts several questions:

1. Is everything we invent or initiate morally ambiguous or downright destructive, even when the negative consequences are unintended?
2. Is this what is meant by the familiar adage: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions"?
3. Is it the case that we want what is good, but we do not understand how to make it so?
4. Are the rest of us who drive the cars, buy the computers, or set the mousetraps complicit in sustaining and supporting the junkyard spreading around us?
5. If we shunned the products of humanity's well-intentioned but ultimately destructive tendencies, what would our world be like?
6. Is humanity predestined to create or consume only what leads us down a "road to hell", whether it be dangerous chemicals, deadly weapons, or nihilistic art forms?
7. Or have we the capacity to make our own heaven on earth?

Some might answer 'yes' to the last question. For instance, poet John Milton wrote:

> The mind is its own place, and in itself
> Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n[214]

Playwright Oscar Wilde would have agreed. He put this famous line into the mouth of one of the characters in *Lady Windermere's Fan*:

> We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.[215]

What both writers were saying is that humans have a choice, a choice in how we think about the world. If the thought begets the deed then we can now start to make everything truly better - once we decide we *want* to. We already have one enormous advantage: in its unspoilt natural state, our Earth is a wondrous and beautiful haven.

In a previous post I wrote about the benefits of the restrictions on personal freedom imposed intermittently since the current crisis began around March 2020.[216] As the noise and pollution caused by human intervention declined, fragile nature became more apparent. Anyone lucky enough to live near a forest or a lake knows what I mean. Even urban dwellers could hear the birdsong more clearly as the roads became quiet

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[213] John Vidal, 'Toxic E-Waste Dumped in Poor Nations, Says United Nations, *Our World*, 16 Dec. 2013 [https://ourworld.unu.edu/en/toxic-e-waste-dumped-in-poor-nations-says-united-nations], 3 Nov 2021.

[214] John Milton, *Paradise Lost and other poems*, intro. Edward le Comte (New York, 1981), p. 44.

[215] Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest, and other plays* (London 1986), p. 54.

[216] Green or Gold? (Part 2): The "Green" Agenda on page 139.

again. With no planes in the sky it was possible to look up and be calmed by the silence above our heads. It felt as if the world had returned to a pre-atomic age - like a foretaste of heaven.

However, as I argued in another article, "We automatically equate our fortunes with those of the planet, its other inhabitants, and its resources".[217] Consequently, for thousands of years, *Homo sapiens* has been imposing his will on nature. As Joni Mitchell sang:

> They paved paradise and put up a parking lot.[218]

But it is not enough to rip up the paving and reveal the beauty beneath. I am convinced that we can at least emulate this beauty in what we create, if we focus on "the stars" rather than on "the gutter".

Artists like Oscar Wilde present us with a vision of an alternative reality they are almost magically equipped to perceive. Their artistic gifts enable them to communicate their vision to the rest of us. So anyone can catch a glimpse of the heightened reality behind our material world, a reality that can be heavenly. But as one astute observer noted, "All that survives, even in the greatest art, is a hint, a shadow of what the artist saw". But that can be enough to induce in us a delicious sensation, which that same observer called "a shivering in your soul".[219]

We each have different tastes of course. What moves one person may leave another cold, and vice versa. In my own case I have experienced that "shivering" when reading Oscar Wilde's "The Selfish Giant" or his *De Profundis*. If art sometimes reflects a heavenly perspective, then I have felt it in the songs of Franz Schubert, the surrealist paintings of Henri Magritte, and the exquisite forms and gorgeous hues of Andalusia's Moorish palaces.

Tchaikovsky believed himself to be at the mercy of a capricious fate, but he could also see into a different and better world when he wanted to. In the music for his *Nutcracker* ballet, for instance, he conjured up a children's fantasy of gingerbread soldiers, Christmas trees, and snowflakes. Tchaikovsky's music is delightful and brings the listener on a journey into a land of magic and mystery that is as far from the despair of the *Pathétique* symphony as it is possible to imagine.

Our species, *Homo sapiens*, has spent much of its history in a world that is being transformed into a hideous caricature of the gift we inherited. That project is almost complete and the godless dystopia imagined by its architects is upon us. We may choose to accept the 'new normal' because it seems like a *fait accompli* that we cannot resist. But that is the point: it is still our choice.

Neither those architects, nor the one they serve, can do anything with-

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[217] Hell into Heaven (Part 1): A new kind of revolution on page 155.
[218] Joni Mitchell, "Big Yellow Taxi", *YouTube*, 6 Nov. 2021.
[219] Brian Cleeve, "The Magic Mountain" (unpublished essay, c. 1990).

out our implied consent. They may frighten and bewilder us into compliance, but they cannot frogmarch anyone into captivity who does not wish to go. We are free - until we decide to surrender that freedom.

We can say 'no', perhaps because we wish to protect our children and grandchildren from an incipient tyranny that threatens to destroy their futures. Or we may be concerned about the wellbeing of the other creatures with whom we share the planet. Or we are motivated by gratitude to the God who created the beauty around us, a beauty that evil would like to bury forever.

Above all we can surely see that heaven and hell are not simply labels for something distant and unimaginable. They are real and concern us now. We can reject with confidence the 'new normal' being prepared by the architects of the present crisis because - thanks to a handful of inspired artists - we know that a different and better reality is at least thinkable.

Of course, saying 'no' is only a first step. But it is a necessary one if we are to restore our precious home to what it once was, and can be again.

MODERN TIMES: A BLOG FROM THE PAST

*First published: 23 October 2021**

In 2007 I began writing a series of online articles for a web site I called *The Sanguine Fan*. The site's ostensible purpose was to promote a book I had just published. But it was really a vehicle for a certain kind of 'pop philosophy' that interested me at the time. However I quickly ran out of ideas (and enthusiasm), and *The Sanguine Fan* petered out after a few months.

Here is the introductory blurb and three of the articles that are still (just about) readable.*

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The Sanguine Fan

Edward Elgar composed some of the most exquisite music ever written. Listening to the slow movement of his second symphony is balm for the soul.

One of Elgar's less well known pieces is *The Sanguine Fan*, a title borrowed for this blog. The ballet for which he wrote this music was based on the familiar semi-circular device used by women of a bygone era to cool themselves. In this case, the fan was blood-red in colour, or sanguine.

Sanguine also means optimistic. And fans can be enthusiastic followers of pop stars, footballers, and other celebrities. Which does not mean that this blog will reflect its author's fervour for any of his personal heroes, including Elgar. It should mean, however, that the tone of these musings about life and the world is hopeful, and even enthusiastic sometimes.

To be or to do

In our busy modern world, activity is valued highly. Almost the first question asked when two people are introduced at a social gathering is "What do you do?"

In many parts of the world the 'protestant work ethic' compels us to lead active and productive lives. Thus, economies grow and produce far more than their citizens can consume.

Where does all this lead us? Clearly to ever higher levels of prosperity, at least in much of the western world. And there is little doubt that if we were to collectively work less and consume less, those familiar economic indicators of GDP and GNP would decline. This raises the question as to whether or not this endless activity represents the primary purpose of mankind.

Do we regard ever-increasing economic growth as unquestionably good? Even when that leads us to earn a living doing something that does not actually benefit us directly (unless of course we spend our days growing and harvesting food for our own table)? Or that drives us to buy goods and service we often do not need?

We live in a world where successful corporations have lifespans longer than any of the individuals who work for them. For example, three companies still thriving today, Coca-Cola, Nokia, and American Express, were all founded in the 19th century. Each one has developed a life and a momentum of its own. Nowadays, their primary purpose is to keep going, and each one uses the energies and skills of its employees, from chief executive to mail-room clerk, to that end.

If we are part of this global consensus, it may be difficult to stand back and reflect on where it is taking us. Is this what it means to be human? To contribute to an economic system for as long as we are capable before handing the task on to the next generation, which then continues the cycle?

Or is there any value at all in doing nothing? Even for a few minutes a day? And 'doing nothing' meaning ceasing mental as well as physical activity? In other words, sitting still and emptying our minds of all distracting thoughts and anxieties?

"Ah!" you say, "that's meditation; sitting in the lotus position and chanting mantras."

But it's not. It simply means stepping off the carousel for a short time in order to become ourselves and, even for a little while, to stop being fodder for an insatiable machine.

And just maybe we will like the feeling of 'being' rather than 'doing'. And then what?

Fear itself

Why is fear such a potent force in so many people's lives? Fear of failure. Fear of standing out. Fear of being rejected. Fear of taking risks.

Fear is a learned characteristic. As young babies we are hungry for new experiences. We explore our surroundings oblivious to any danger. Then we may touch something sharp or hot and realise that the world is not a benign playground created just for us. Perhaps it is that first experience of external pain that plants the seed of fear in our young minds.

And so we grow into adulthood accumulating fears. There are many things to be afraid of nowadays: being fired, mobile phone radiation, suicide bombers, becoming overweight. The list is endless. In an era of mass communication, there is bound to be some threat out there with the potential to strike fear into the most sanguine heart. Before we know it, we have become so completely moulded by our fears that we cannot see how things could be any different. We say to ourselves: "This is how I am. There is no point trying to be someone else." We learn to hunker down and live within constraints that are entirely self-imposed.

But at what stage in our lives is it too late to change who we are? Is it ever too late? The poet William Henley wrote

I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul.

Individual sovereignty is a concept easy to forget in our interdependent society. Yet who but ourselves should determine the kind of person we are? Certainly not any politician, movie star, or religious leader. We choose who we are, even when we imagine that the choice has been made for us.

That awareness alone should offer hope. Because every new day brings with it the opportunity to choose again.

Choosing

Why is it that most of us, at some points in our lives, find ourselves doing or saying something we realise later to have been wrong. How many times have we said, if only to ourselves, "How could I have said that? What possessed me?"

It can be a little frightening at first to find that there are occasions when we seem to lose absolute control over our own actions. Then, as we grow older and perhaps a little more cynical, we learn to accept that we are not always masters or mistresses of our behaviour. Perhaps we have too much to drink and commit some shameful indiscretion, or something just 'comes over' us, giving us cause to regret our actions later.

And this is not simply a personal or subjective phenomenon. People accused of crimes, even serious ones, have been acquitted or received lesser convictions if it has been demonstrated in court that they were not fully responsible for what they did. So our society seems to accept that we are not always personally accountable for our behaviour. But if this is the case, who is responsible?

Children's comic papers and cartoons often used to illustrate a moral dilemma by showing two tiny figures perched on a character's shoulders. On one shoulder was a horned devil holding a trident. On the other, a little winged angel all dressed in white. The demon was trying to persuade the character to do something naughty, while the angel urged him not to.

The writer, C. S. Lewis, developed this theme in his still-popular *Screwtape Letters*. Yet he was careful to point out that the final decision about any moral question rested with the individual person.

So what is the truth? Are we like leaves in the wind, buffeted hither and thither by forces greater than ourselves? Or are we sovereign in our own personal realms? Tempted towards evil, but always retaining free will to decide the sort of person we want to be?

In the whole history of mankind, is there even one example of someone whose will prevailed over external pressures or temptations, who refused to go against what he or she believed to be good? For if there is only one such example, then, because of our common humanity, it is also possible for any one of us.

One example? What about the alcoholic who forswears drink because of how it makes him treat his family? Or the poor young woman who

returns a wallet dropped on the street to its rightful owner? Or the mother who forgives her child's killers rather than harbour revenge against them?

Our world is full of commonplace heroes, demonstrating daily that we can always choose goodness, no matter how difficult it may seem at the time.

SANTA CLAUS IS COMING TO TOWN!

First published: 20 November 2021

Will we reach the point this Christmas when a certain red-suited, white-bearded, and well-padded individual is finally exposed for the fraud that he is? I refer of course to Santa Claus - and his countless minions - now settling into 'grottoes' and stores across the globe.

Perhaps the tipping point will be the news that, in Ireland in 2021, anyone taking their child to see Santa must produce a vaccination certificate before being allowed in. Or perhaps people will be alerted by the new Tesco Christmas ad showing a Santa-clone displaying a Covid-19 'passport' on his phone.

However, given the apathy with which the public are responding to the worldwide shakedown now stripping them of their financial independence and civil rights, I am not optimistic. But we can be hopeful. Perhaps what follows will persuade even a few readers to think again about promoting the seasonal huckster to any young child in their vicinity.

Writers and commentators usually trace the origins of Santa Claus back to an early Christian saint named Nicholas of Myra (a town in modern-day Turkey). However, the connections between Nicholas, Christmas, and Santa are pretty weak. They revolve mainly around stories of the saint's generosity towards children and his purported death in December 343 AD. Santa Claus, as we know him today, is a much more recent phenomenon.

The character was invented in the early 19th century by three members of New York's elite. They were John Pintard (1759-1844), Washington Irving (1783-1859), and Clement Clarke Moore (1779-1863). These men popularised a kind of Saint Nicholas/Santa Claus hybrid, most notably in Irving's satirical novel, *A history of New York* (published under the pseudonym, Diedrich Knickerbocker), and Moore's poem, "A Visit from St. Nicholas" (or "The Night before Christmas"). Both these works concocted a new 'tradition' of St. Nicholas as a supernatural benefactor who, according to Irving:

> Came riding over the tops of the trees, in that self-same waggon wherein he brings his yearly presents to children.[220]

In his depiction of St. Nicholas, Irving not only conjured up many of our present-day customs, such as Christmas stockings and gift-giving, he also set the tone for subsequent portrayals of his 'fairy godfather' as a political and commercial mercenary. So, in Irving's novel, Nicholas is presented retrospectively as having been the protector, or patron saint, of New

[220] Diedrich Knickerbocker, *A history of New York: From the beginning of the world to the end of the Dutch dynasty; being the only authentic history of the times that ever hath been published* (London 1839), p. 83.

York's Dutch colony in their conflict against the British.[221]

Robert W. Weir (1803-1889) was another New Yorker from the top tier of society. His 1837 painting, 'Saint Nicholas', was influenced by the descriptions provided by Pintard, Irving, and Moore.[222] All four men probably knew each other through their membership of the New-York Historical Society. The odd symbols and gestures displayed by the 'saint' in Weir's painting probably reflect the masonic circles in which had least some of these men moved.[223]

It was not until a later New York artist named Thomas Nast (1840-1902) depicted him in a series of magazine illustrations that the familiar image of Santa Claus as full-bearded and tubby was created. Nast's very first drawing was published in *Harper's Weekly* magazine in January 1863, and he continued the precedent set by Irving in aligning his subject with a political cause.

> Drawn during the height of the Civil War, the illustration presented Santa Claus dressed in an outfit covered with stars and stripes borrowed from the American flag. From the bag on his shoulder, he busily distributes Christmas gifts to the Union soldiers at an isolated military camp.[224]

Given such a partisan rendering it is little wonder that President Abraham Lincoln hailed Nast as "our best recruiting sergeant".[225]

As consumerism gathered pace throughout the late-19th and early-20th centuries, business interests were quick to exploit the commercial opportunities offered by Santa Claus and Christmas. Gift-giving was becoming a significant driver of retail profitability, and demand for seasonal products increased hugely as the year-end approached. But who would ensure there were enough goods for shoppers to buy in the run-up to Christmas?

On Christmas Eve 1909 the answer appeared in a newspaper report highlighting the darker side of the Santa industry.

> It is in the box factories, the "card" factories, in the factories that turn out the stores of beautiful things for Santa Claus's Budget that the masses of the child workers throng for the Xmas rush.[226]

While sweatshops today tend to be located in the poorer parts of the Third World, this article focused on the exploitation of children in American cities, such as New York, Chicago and Philadelphia. During the busy Christmas period, according to the writer, employees of one New York

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221 Jonathan A. Cook , '"Prodigious Poop": Comic Context and Psychological Subtext in Irving's Knickerbocker History', in *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 49/4, Mar. 1995, p. 486, fn. 7.

222 Lauretta Dimmick, 'Robert Weir's Saint Nicholas: A Knickerbocker Icon', in *The Art Bulletin*, 66/3 (Sep., 1984), pp. 465-483.

223 Joseph N. Balestier, *Historical sketches of Holland lodge* (New York 1862).

224 David Shirley, *Thomas Nast: Cartoonist and illustrator* (New York, 1998), p. 90.

225 Ibid, p. 42.

226 *Evening Heral*d, 24 Dec. 1909.

factory had to work from 7:30am to 9:00pm, seven days a week, making boxes to hold the sweetmeats, gewgaws, and other seasonal paraphernalia being sold in department stores and shops. The report claimed that, contrary to the labour laws of the time, most child workers were "well under 14". They were also mainly young girls, because "little girls…work for nothing, they object to nothing". The writer went on to state that girls were preferred over boys because they were "timid, so they do not cry out against hard conditions, nor complain when their fingers are caught and crushed in the machines".

Images of Santa Claus were used by vested interests to promote or sell virtually anything. For much of the 20th century Santa's commercial potential was exploited by Coca-Cola, a manufacturer of a sweet, syrupy soft drink. Through a plethora of posters and magazine ads he was often shown drinking a bottle of Coke while distributing presents in American homes. So ubiquitous and long-lasting was the company's use of the Christmas icon in their ads that many people believe that Santa Claus was invented by Coca-Cola.[227]

Throughout Santa Claus' history he has been seen by adults as a fictional character whom children were encouraged to accept, until eventually they would grow out of it. However, in Ireland at any rate, the line between fantasy and reality is fading fast. In recent years, during the lead-up to Christmas, Irish broadcast and print media have been covering the 'activities' of the chubby one as if he were a real person. A typical example is a 'special report' broadcast by RTE TV news on Christmas Eve 2013.[228]

The report focused on the logistical challenges Santa would have to face in travelling across the planet in a single night. The science behind this feat was explained by professors from the country's top universities, UCD and TCD. The report also covered the vital role played by Dublin's air traffic controllers in guiding Santa through the Irish leg of his journey. Finally Evelyn Cusack of the Meteorological Service reminded viewers that, because of Ireland's proximity to the North Pole, they should have an early night because "we could be one of his first stops".

Sadly this kind of nonsense has been exacerbated during the current crisis. In Christmas 2020 *The Irish Times* reported that Callum Thornhill, a six-year-old boy from Cork, had written to pharmaceutical giant Pfizer asking "if they could send Covid vaccines to Santa Claus and his elves".[229] Callum received a reply from Pfizer's Irish division assuring him that Santa, his wife, and the elves "were safe and well". News of the boy's letter eventually made its way to Pfizer CEO, Albert Bourla. He was sufficiently

[227] Bruce David Forbes, *Christmas: A Candid History* (Berkeley, CA. 2007), p. 93.
[228] RTÉ - IRELAND'S NATIONAL PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA , 'Santa Claus is coming to town | RTÉ News Christmas 2013', *YouTube*, 24 Dec. 2013.
[229] *Irish Times*, 24 Dec. 2020.

moved by the youngster's plea to post a message on LinkedIn declaring that "we are doing everything we can to help bring hope to people around the world". Bourla concluded his message by reassuring Callum that Pfizer would "take care of Santa and his elves too".[230]

But there is a serious side to what might otherwise seem like ill-judged whimsy on the part of *The Irish Times*. According to a recent report in that newspaper, sales of Pfizer's Covid-19 vaccine are expected to add revenues of $33.5bn to Pfizer's coffers by the end of 2021. The article went on to state that

> Pfizer has more than doubled the 2021 sales forecast for its Covid-19 vaccine since February and predicted another bumper year in 2022 as it expands global distribution and begins shipping jabs for boosters and children.[231]

In other words the financial bonanza is set to continue if Pfizer can get its vaccine into the arms of millions of children around the world, children just like Callum Thornhill.

During the 19th century Santa Claus was transformed from an obscure Christian saint into an icon of modern capitalism. By invoking the fictional fat man during the Christmas period, Albert Bourla is following in the footsteps of earlier commercial interests for whom Santa Claus is the ultimate sales rep. Santa represents what might be termed the 'acceptable face of capitalism'. That is, he promotes 'kindness' and 'altruism' while never mentioning the greed and acquisitiveness that lie at the heart of our consumer society.

As long as we support the brand of contrived benevolence that Santa Claus promotes, each new generation of children will be drawn into the consumerist ideology that now defines our world. But it is not just the endless consumption of useless stuff at Christmas that should concern us all.

Following the advent of the world-wide "pandemic", those eager to push us into the "new normal" have already shown their determination to target children using the emotional appeal and cuddly persona of Santa Claus.

Don't let them succeed.

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[230] Albert Bourla, Dec. 2020, 'Letters like these – from children brimming with compassion and hope – remind us of why the work we do every day is so important.', [Post]. *LinkedIn* [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/albert-bourla_letters-like-these-from-children-brimming-activity-6747178435912720384-X5XM], 16 Nov. 2021.

[231] *Irish Times*, 2 Nov. 2021.

MONEY (PART 1): "MONEY IS OUR MADNESS, OUR VAST COLLECTIVE MADNESS." (D.H. LAWRENCE)

First published: 02 Jan 2022

What is money? The common definition is that it is a 'medium of exchange'. In other words it is a mechanism that enables us to buy or sell whatever we need or want at any given time. This is possible because money is also a 'store of value'.

That does not mean that the bank notes, coins, digital currencies, etc., we use are themselves inherently valuable. Euro coins contain no precious metals, being composed mainly of steel and copper alloys.[232] But we all *believe* that the money circulating in society is valuable, and so our trust in the financial system keeps it going. Without that shared faith in money our complex civilisation would quickly collapse.

There is one big drawback with money though - we can't take it with us. For a prosperous person who believes in an afterlife, or suspects there might be something else when we die, that is an unavoidable fact. Benjamin Franklin once wrote: "In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes". He was half-right. Taxes can be avoided or evaded. Death cannot. Taking account of this obvious reality, some people have so much faith in money that they think it could be useful in the next world. Here are two examples.

The papal indulgence

In 1515 the recently-elected pope, Leo X, decided to raise money for an important project he had inherited from his predecessors. This was the construction of a magnificent new basilica in Rome to replace the ancient seat of papal power and prestige, then falling into disrepair.

Leo saw an opportunity to boost the budget for this ambitious project through a fund-raising drive among European Catholics. In return for their donations he offered participants an extraordinary spiritual benefit:

> A plenary indulgence to those who would penitently confess their sins and contribute according to their means to the building of a new St. Peter's.[233]

When the fund-raising campaign reached Germany the local organiser, Johann Tetzel, made sure that potential buyers understood exactly what a "plenary indulgence" could do for them.

> When you die the gates of punishment shall be shut, and the gates of the paradise of delight shall be opened: and if you shall not die at present, this grace shall remain in full force when you are at the point of death.[234]

Medieval Catholics believed that after death they faced three possibilities.

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[232] 'Common sides', *European Central Bank* [https://www.ecb.europa.eu/euro/coins/common/html/index.en.html], 1 Jan. 2022.
[233] Will Durant, *The Reformation: A history of European civilization from Wyclif to Calvin, 1300-1564* (New York, 1957), p. 138.
[234] quoted in ibid.

Unrepentant sinners were sent to hell where they had to suffer everlasting torment at the hands of the devil and his angels. In contrast, those who died in a state of grace immediately entered the ranks of the blessed with whom they could enjoy the raptures of heaven forever. Everyone else went to purgatory.

As the name implies, purgatory was a temporary stop on the road to paradise where those not quite ready for the heavenly delights were purged of their sins. Purgatory was 'a provisional hell', where souls would undergo the same terrible suffering as their inferno-bound counterparts, but at least it did not go on forever. Nevertheless who wouldn't want to avoid the place if they could? This is what those promoting the indulgence were banking on. As Tetzel put it in his sales pitch:

> Won't you part with even a farthing to buy this letter? It won't bring you money but rather a divine and immortal soul, whole and secure in the Kingdom of Heaven.[235]

The price of the indulgence letter was calculated at about 1% of annual income, so more than Tetzel's "farthing" but still affordable by many. In the city of Duderstadt where average earnings were 100 Rhenish guilders per annum, penitent punters would have had to pay about a guilder to secure their places in heaven.[236] For someone earning around €30,000 today, that works out at around €300. Not a bad deal if you were concerned about the fate of your soul in the afterlife.

However a young Augustinian friar named Martin Luther was appalled at this blatant hawking of spiritual favours by the pope. He outlined his objections in a public letter to his archbishop. Luther had a particular problem with how the indulgence would be seen by ordinary folk who, he stated:

> believe that when they have bought indulgence letters they are then assured of their salvation. They are likewise convinced that souls escape from purgatory as soon as they have placed a contribution into the chest.[237]

His letter made its way to Rome and into the hands of Leo X himself. The result was the Reformation, a political and social revolution that overturned Europe's religious uniformity and paved the way for centuries of division and conflict.

Leo's plan may have led to a massive rift in European Christianity, but there is another question I would like to focus on here. What if you could parlay your earthly financial status into some everlasting spiritual benefit that would make eternity a lot easier for yourself? Isn't that what the promoters of Leo's indulgence scheme were really selling: the chance to 'take

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[235] quoted in Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A history* (New York 2005), p. 123.
[236] Reinhold Kiermayr, 'How Much Money was Actually in the Indulgence Chest?', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 17/3 (Autumn, 1986), pp. 303-318.
[237] Gottfried G. Krodel (ed.), *Luther's Works, vol. 48, Letters I* (Philadelphia, 1963), p. 46.

it with you'?

But now? Surely in our secular materialistic world that combination of avarice and religiosity is so rare as to be almost non-existent.

Enter Jimmy Savile.

Balancing the books

Elsewhere I have described the late disc jockey as "a byword for sexual depravity on an almost unimaginable scale".[238] Jimmy Savile was a Roman Catholic who believed in an afterlife. Being a clever fellow, he came up with a plan to get into heaven after he died. He believed he could achieve this by ensuring that, at the end of his life, his good deeds would far outweigh his sins.

Savile spoke about his salvation strategy many times in public and in private. Following his death, a BBC colleague recalled a conversation he had with the celebrity DJ on this topic:

> 'I once listened bemused as Savile expiated at length in the BBC canteen on the reasons why St. Peter wouldn't dare bar him from heaven,' he said. "What do you mean he's led an immoral life?" God would say to him. "Have you any idea how much money he's raised for charity? Or how many hours he's put in as a porter at that hospital? Get them doors opened now and quick!"'[239]

Savile never revealed the true nature of his "immoral life" while he was alive. He did relate numerous episodes of his sexual 'conquests' – but he included only enough details to create the impression in the public mind that he was nothing more than a roguish jack-the-lad with an eye for the girls.[240]

Nevertheless, as far as his Church was concerned, even what Savile was prepared to admit publicly was undoubtedly sinful. Yet in October 1981 Pope John Paul II awarded the DJ a papal knighthood for his charity fund-raising activities.[241] If Savile ever needed official recognition that his plan to get past St. Peter might actually work, this was surely it.

Of course he knew he was guilty of a lot more than colourful sexual peccadilloes. But he must have convinced himself that, no matter how many youngsters he defiled or raped, as long as he devoted himself to endless fund-raising for hospitals and other good causes he would be OK in the end. As his biographer wrote:

> If his charitable deeds were designed to salve a guilty conscience, there is evidence he knew he had to raise a lot to balance the ledger.[242]

In its essence, Savile's strategy was not far removed from the papal indul-

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[238] Ag dul sa tóir ar na deamhain ("Chasing demons") on page 85.
[239] quoted in Davies, *In Plain Sight*.
[240] *Daily Telegraph*, 26 Oct. 2012.
[241] *Evening Echo*, 22 Oct. 1981.
[242] Davies, *In Plain Sight*.

gence scheme. Both rested on the assumption that accumulating money, whether for oneself or for others, could yield spiritual dividends in the next world. It presupposes that God is like an accountant who calculates the good and the bad in an individual's life. In this imagined scenario, when God tots up the two columns in the celestial ledger, He can see straightaway if the soul before Him is eligible for heaven or should be flung into hell. And, as Savile and many other medieval Catholics believed, using money to do 'good' would boost their credit in God's eyes.

But whether or not a rich person is an atheist or a believer, they must surely realise this is nonsense. It is not as if money is equivalent to grace, is it? Yes, money can make life very comfortable if you have lots of it to spend on pleasurable things. Who would not like to travel first class, or stay in a five-star hotel, or enjoy a private box at the opera or the football game?

But, for anyone with an eye on the next world, the money itself is not much use - and we can't take it with us. So why do we seek more of something that in the long run has no real substance or inherent worth? Why do we covet money?

MONEY (PART 2): FREEDOM OR BONDAGE?

First published: 16 January 2022

Money has been part of our existence for so long that its origins are unknown. But no matter how far back into history you go, one thing is clear. Those who own or control the money have lorded it over those who don't, as two examples from the distant past illustrate.

Thousands of years before Christ, the ancient civilisation of Sumer comprised the familiar-to-us societal divisions between the powerful and the weak, the rich and the poor. We are told that someone who could not afford to eat "had to dig into his savings". And after that?

> When his savings gave out, he had to borrow from the ancient counterparts of our own loan sharks. Hence the saying: "The poor man borrows and worries."[243]

Money was no less important in later societies. During one of their periodic famines, the Egyptians of the pre-Christian era bewailed their inability to feed themselves "for our money is gone". So, according to the Bible, they sold themselves into bondage to the Pharaoh in order to avoid starvation.[244]

Anyone without money in ancient times faced anxiety and stress at the prospect of indebtedness or poverty. It is no different today. For those in need of the things they cannot afford to buy, there are the modern equivalents of the Pharaoh and those ancient loan sharks. They will provide

[243] Samuel Noah Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer* (New York 1959), pp. 121-2.
[244] Genesis, 47:13-26.

money to those who don't have it – but at a price.

If it is a lender that price may be counted in additional interest or surcharge payments, sometimes outrageously punitive. But the state also exacts a price from those to whom it provides financial help. That price is psychological rather than physical or financial - but it is none the less real.

George Orwell

Apart from food and clothing, one of the necessities of life is shelter. During the 1930s writer George Orwell investigated the accommodation available to the English poor. In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, he described in considerable detail the stink and the squalor of the privately-owned inner-city slums in which thousands lived in barely-imaginable conditions.[245]

The state tried to alleviate those conditions by building new housing estates, and Orwell wrote about them too. For the slum-dwellers they were a big step up from the grim back streets and alleyways they had been inhabiting. The new houses were a lot roomier and had amenities like hot-and-cold running water and indoor toilets. However, as Orwell noted, there were also drawbacks.

The corporation estates were often built on the outskirts of a town or city. This made it more difficult and expensive for the breadwinner to get to work. There were fewer shops and pubs around and prices tended to be higher than in their inner-city equivalents. Councils imposed restrictions which seemed petty to residents, such as a ban on keeping pigeons or chickens on the property. Some local authorities insisted that their new tenants be deloused or fumigated before being allowed into their new homes – "dipped like sheep" is how Orwell described the process.

But surely these disadvantages were trivial compared to the much better conditions in which residents now lived? Shouldn't they have shut up complaining and just been grateful to the state for its beneficence?

George Orwell did not think so. His conclusion that "On balance, the Corporation estates are better than the slums, but only by a small margin", revealed his reservations. These reservations were difficult to quantify but they reflected the strong feeling he developed during his research that the state's new tenants had been robbed of "the last vestiges of their liberty". This was because of what he described as the "uncomfortable, almost prisonlike atmosphere" of the new Corporation estates.

Orwell did not argue that residents of these estates should go back to the filth and damp of the slums. He was pointing out that their desire to live in better conditions had somehow reduced their personal freedom, a freedom already diminished by their poverty.

We may imagine that things have improved since Orwell's day. But

[245] George Orwell, *The Non-Fiction of George Orwell* (Oxford, 2021), pp. 152-62.

have they?

Without enough money of one's own, it is impossible to be fully part of society. A pauper has very few options. He can either eschew the comforts of modern life and live rough on the streets, or he can cling to the bottom rung of the social ladder by accepting state aid - along with the myriad rules and regulations that accompany such aid.

For the poor, life is presented as a stark choice between a freedom that is inevitably harsh and brutal, and a submission to the state that may be demeaning but is undoubtedly more comfortable than the alternative. The rest of us are not off the hook either. In all likelihood we must sell our labour to an employer in order to earn enough money to participate in society.

Unless one has inherited a fortune, an alternative (legal) route to riches is gambling or playing the lottery. While the chances of winning the top prize are almost non-existent, millions take a punt because in our world money equals freedom.

But is it possible to be free - and also thrive as a human being? Why do we live in a culture that practically worships money? That regards every human interaction as a potential plus or minus on the balance sheet? How did we get here?

Adam Smith

Although money has been around for millennia, it is only in the last 250 years or so that it has become central to the functioning of society. If any one person is responsible for this state of affairs, it is the "father of economics", Adam Smith (1723-1790).

Smith was an advocate of the rationalist approach to advancing the lot of man and society. He and his Enlightenment counterparts, such as Voltaire and John Locke, promulgated ideas that have so shaped the modern world that it is hard to imagine anything else.

Smith collected his thoughts in *The Wealth of Nations* published in 1776, a book described by one commentator as the "Bible [of] economic liberalism".[246] In this influential work, the author contrasted the economic efficiency possible in a modern industrialised society with what he supposed must be the lot of primitive tribes, whom he derided for being:

> so miserably poor, that from mere want, they are frequently reduced… to the necessity sometimes of directly destroying, and sometimes of abandoning their infants, their old people, and those afflicted with lingering diseases, to perish with hunger, or to be devoured by wild beasts.[247]

In Smith's ideal world, however, even the poorest member of society could avoid such barbarity, because

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[246] 'Smith, Adam' in *Chambers Encyclopaedia*, vol. XII (London 1950), pp. 611-3.

[247] Adam Smith, *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations* (2 vols., London 1776), i. p. 2.

> if he is frugal and industrious, [he] may enjoy a greater share of the necessaries and conveniences of life than it is possible for any savage to acquire.[248]

Smith's thesis was that society could become prosperous if it adopted and standardised the practices then being implemented by private entrepreneurs at the cutting edge of the Industrial Revolution. Through a combination of the latest technology and a division of labour, these businesses were able to produce far more goods than would be possible for individuals working alone.

Smith offered the example of a pin manufacturer. The straight pin was a small, pointy piece of metal widely used as a fastening device for paper and clothing. Smith reckoned that one skilled person could make no more than one or two pins a day. However, if the manufacturing process were divided up between a number of operatives, with one cutting the metal, another sharpening the point, etc., according to Smith, a team of only 10 people could produce an astonishing 48,000 pins in a single day.[249]

In *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith offered his template for a new industrialised society that would bring prosperity to all those willing to abide by its rules. Those rules required a different approach to work. The single craftsman would be replaced by an assembly line at which each worker performed one component task repeatedly. Smith envisaged that one day such tasks might be undertaken by a machine of some sort.

So our consumer society was born. As long as there were enough customers to buy the profusion of cheaper goods coming out of the factories, the resulting surge in economic activity would boost the material well-being of everyone. Smith's "industrious and frugal peasant" would, he contended, enjoy a degree of luxury "exceed[ing] that of", what he referred to condescendingly as, "many an African king, the absolute masters of the lives and liberties of ten thousand naked savages".[250]

However, as George Orwell found, the reality for many of Adam Smith's "peasants" turned out to be very different. Sometimes material comfort comes at a price that may not be immediately apparent to the beneficiary. Indeed that is the problem in sustaining any civilisation based around money, as our culture is. Money (and its proponents like Adam Smith) promises a lot more than it can ever deliver. It is, as D.H. Lawrence wrote, "our vast collective madness".[251]

Lawrence was not the only one to see this. Long before his time someone else tried to alert us to the illusory power of money.

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[248] Ibid.
[249] Ibid, i. pp. 6-7.
[250] Ibid, i. p. 15.
[251] 'Money-madness', in D. H. Lawrence, *The complete poems of D. H. Lawrence* (New York 1977), pp. 486-7.

MONEY (PART 3): A WARNING FROM THE PAST

First published: 30 January 2022

We come into the world naked and with nothing. We leave this world naked and with nothing. In between we are taught to regard money as essential to life itself. Isn't it though? How could our society, our civilisation, our people survive without it? Money may be an illusion, but surely it is an *essential* illusion?

Jesus Christ did not believe that money is essential, far from it. At least that is how he comes across in the Gospel accounts of his life and teachings. Many of Jesus' teachings, and even some of his actions, suggest that he wanted to break (or at least loosen) the grip money has over our lives. This was not just a minor aspect of his main mission, which the Gospels say was to "save his people from their sins"; I am convinced it was central to that mission.[252] St. Paul reflected this when he wrote in one of his letters that "The love of money is the root of *all* evil".[253] There is abundant evidence in the Gospels that Jesus never lost an opportunity to express his antipathy towards our "love of money", especially when it encroached on our relationship with God.

Although Jesus mostly expressed himself through words, occasionally he resorted to direct action in order to convey the strength of his feelings. Perhaps the best-known example is the incident in which he drove the money-changers from the temple in Jerusalem. This event is one of the few recorded in all four Gospels so it must have made a great impression on those who witnessed it. What seems to have especially angered Jesus was the sight of bankers and hawkers carrying out their financial transactions inside such a sacred place.[254]

As I said, that moment of outrage was not typical. Jesus preferred to persuade and enlighten through the parables he told his followers or the exchanges he had with people he met along the way. Another example illustrates this.

Shortly after the fracas in the temple Jesus was asked by some city officials whether or not he supported the taxes imposed by Rome. Instead of responding with a political statement as his interlocutors expected, Jesus took the opportunity to make a point about money itself. Taking in his hand a coin bearing the likeness of the emperor, Jesus said,

> Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.[255]

As I described in an earlier article, the Roman emperor was a disposable

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[252] Matthew, 1:21.
[253] 1 Timothy, 6:9-10. (Emphasis added)
[254] John, 1:13-16.
[255] Matthew, 22:17-21.

servant of "the ruler of this world", Satan.[256] This would-be overlord had already tried and failed to tempt Jesus into a subordinate position to himself. Had he accepted, Jesus might have ended up as a superior to Tiberius, but he would still have been Satan's lackey. That was probably in Jesus' mind when he considered the question about taxes.

So in his reply, I do not believe that Jesus was commenting on the legitimacy of the Roman occupation of Palestine. Nor do I think he was defining for evermore the separation of powers between church and state. I suspect also that whether his fellow countrymen should pay their taxes to Rome or Jerusalem was of little concern to Jesus.

I believe he was using the example of a Roman coin to point out a more fundamental truth to his listeners. Money was a symbol of Satan's hold over their lives. If they were prepared to place their trust in money, then of course they, and it, belonged to the authority behind it, in this case the Roman empire.

It is fair to say that Jesus tolerated the use of money as long as it did not lure its owner away from God. But he would have preferred if everyone could do without it completely. When he met one wealthy man who genuinely wanted to serve God, Jesus suggested that he "sell what you possess and give to the poor". But this was a step too far for the man and we are told that "he went away sorrowful". This encounter prompted Jesus to declare to his disciples that

> it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.[257]

Yet Jesus would have welcomed that rich man into his company, even if he held on to his money. After all one of his disciples was another rich man, Joseph of Arimathea, who provided his own tomb to house Jesus' body after the crucifixion.[258] Jesus did not reject the rich, but maybe it was difficult for some to stay too long in his presence.

Jesus could rightly proclaim that Satan had no power over him. That was in part because he, Jesus, was not in love with money. He was well-educated and probably came from a reasonably affluent background, but I can find no evidence that Jesus himself was ever anxious or concerned about his own daily needs. Yet he knew enough about money to include financial details in his parables, details that he must have hoped would resonate with his audience. There are several examples, but perhaps the best-known is the Parable of the Pounds (or Mina).[259]

The story concerns a nobleman or lord who allocated a pound each (about 3 months' wages for a labourer) to ten of his servants just before

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[256] The ruler of this world: Time to go? on page 143.
[257] Matthew, 19:16-24.
[258] Matthew, 27:57-60.
[259] Luke, 19:11-27.

he departed to "a far country to receive kingly power". He told the servants that he wanted them to trade the money while he was abroad. On his return he found that, while two servants had multiplied his investment several times over, one had kept it in a napkin and therefore could not even offer his master the interest the money would have gained in a bank account. The nobleman was furious and ordered that the pound be handed over to the servant who had achieved the best return. There is a subplot to this parable involving the nobleman's tenants, whom he has killed because they expressed great dissatisfaction with his stewardship.

On the face of it, this story represents everything Jesus opposed. The nobleman was not only a servant of his nemesis, "the ruler of this world", he was also advancing further up that ruler's chain of command. Secondly the protagonist was encouraging his staff to play the market in order to increase their wealth. Finally this nobleman slaughtered his unfortunate vassals when they dared to oppose his tyranny.

Jesus' parables were his favourite way of presenting a moral viewpoint in a form intelligible to his audience.[260] The Parable of the Pounds is commonly understood to be a lesson from Jesus about the need for those seeking the kingdom of God not to be afraid to take risks.[261] But surely there is another more likely interpretation?

Jesus was well aware of the human weaknesses and failings of his listeners. He wanted to free them from their enslavement to evil but, like a good physician, he could help only those who accepted his diagnosis. And that diagnosis was sometimes stark and even shocking to those who heard it.

> You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.[262]

Could there be a more accurate representation of the nobleman in Jesus' parable?

What if, instead of giving his listeners a lesson in divine risk-taking, Jesus was actually warning them of the dangers of running down the devil's money trail? If they continued they would find themselves at the mercy of a pitiless despot who would think nothing of chewing them up and spitting them out. It would not be God's punishment that destroyed them, but the devil's vengeance directed against those who displeased him.

Had he lived longer Jesus might have shown his followers how to wean themselves off their addiction to money. But he was killed at the age of 33

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[260] Calvocoressi, *Who's who in the Bible*, pp. 105-7.
[261] Vermes, *The authentic Gospel of Jesus*, p. 139
[262] John, 8:44.

and so we are left with an incomplete picture. It is clear that Jesus believed we should give up our dependence on money and turn to God instead. But how?

Two thousand years after Jesus' death we are much deeper in the money trap than those first-century Palestinians. All around us are signs that "the ruler of this world" is bent on tightening his hold over humanity, using money as one of his chief weapons, whether in the form of bribes to ensure compliance with his decrees, or financial penalties to banish dissent. So how do we get off the treadmill before it's too late?

MONEY (PART 4): RENAISSANCE FLORENCE - A STUDY IN FUTILITY

First published: 12 February 2022

Jesus was still a young man when he was executed by the Romans. So we can only guess how different our world would be today if he had lived long enough to develop and spread his teachings. As it is, his warnings about money never took root in the new religion that sprung up after his death.

In 2011, as part of my history course, I had a chance to examine the reality of Christian life in a society dripping with money. This was the Italian city-state of Florence during the Renaissance. There, fifteen-hundred years after Jesus chased the money-lenders out of the temple in Jerusalem, Florentines were trying to keep both God and Mammon happy.

What guidance did the Catholic Church offer to those who aspired to spiritual salvation *and* great wealth? That was the question I set out to address in an essay I wrote more than a decade ago. What follows is an edited version of that essay, now published for the first time.

* * *

The Church was an integral part of Renaissance Florence. The dozens of sacred buildings, from the mighty Basilica to the lowliest parish church, were a permanent reminder of Catholicism's strong and visible presence in the city. Economically, the Church was strong too, with estimates of its property holdings ranging from a quarter to one-third of the available land.

The wealth of the medieval Church meant that it could not preach about earthly riches in the same direct fashion as Jesus had. To do so would have undermined its position due to the obvious contradiction between its behaviour and the principles set out in the Gospels. Consequently, a more sophisticated and nuanced theology was required, particularly as the growth in trade and commerce from the eleventh century onwards made the acquisition of riches a reality for more and more people.

As the Church would not turn its face against wealth *per se*, it concentrated instead on the means by which its members acquired wealth. In

line with its own position as a major landholder, the Church held that the best way to riches was to acquire and farm arable land. Trade, however, was a different matter.

The Church believed that God did not like merchants, but it found a loophole that allowed Catholic clergy to at least tolerate the practice of commerce. If a trader or merchant was interested only in making a profit, his actions were sinful. If, however, he wanted simply to improve the lot of his family and his community, and he acted honestly, his activities were acceptable in the eyes of the Church.

That still left one major obstacle to a full rapprochement between religion and commerce, i.e. usury. The addition of *any* interest to a loan was regarded by clerical authorities as usury and the practice was condemned by the Church. The penalty was excommunication and anyone who argued against the Church's teaching was to be treated as a heretic.

In a commercial hub like Renaissance Florence, the practical effect of the Church's ban on usury could have had serious negative implications. Commercial loans and partnership arrangements were common, and potentially usurious, depending on how Church teaching was interpreted. The critical factor was the Florentine clergy and how they implemented the Church's laws. In effect, as will become clear, the Church in Florence adopted what can be described only as a benign attitude towards the commercial life of the city. This manifested itself in the surprisingly elastic interpretation of Church law against usury taken by prominent clerics.

In the early fourteenth century, a Dominican, Giordano da Pisa, preached in favour of commerce as a necessary antidote to the feudal vendettas that had plagued Florence for many years. A century later, another Dominican, Giovanni Dominici, was more explicit, describing Christ in one sermon as 'the celestial merchant', which was undoubtedly a boost to the businessmen in his congregation. Dominici was the son of a Florentine silk merchant and he demonstrated his feelings for the city in 1406 when he urged his listeners to 'fight for the patria, not steal from the Commune (government)'.[263]

Antonino Pierozzi, a native of the city, was an Observantist Dominican, that is, he adhered to the stricter form of the order's rule. He was a theologian who became archbishop of Florence in 1446. In his preaching and his writings he expressed his strong opposition to usury, but he was also sensitive to the needs of the city's merchants as he elucidated the Church's laws on the matter. For instance, the government had instituted a funding mechanism called the *Monte comune*, which required citizens to make loans to the state in return for which they received interest repayments.

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[263] Daniel R. Lesnick, 'Civic preaching in the early Renaissance', in Timothy Verdon and John Henderson (eds.), *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1990), pp. 208-225.

This clearly contravened the ban on usury, yet Antonino not only approved the system but also the trade in *Monte* shares which could leave sellers with huge gains.

Antonino's attitude to the *Monte* was not novel. The institution of the scheme in the mid-fourteenth century had led to considerable debate as to whether or not it would lead the city's inhabitants into collective usury. It was a Franciscan, Francesco da Empoli, who, in his *Determinatio de materia montis*, concluded that participants in the Monte were innocent of usurious behaviour. It might seem odd that a member of the order founded by Francis of Assisi, who eschewed wealth and privilege, should be so accommodating to the financial needs of a secular government. But Francesco was not the only Franciscan to demonstrate flexibility when it came to interpreting the Church's position on usury.

Bernardino of Siena was an Observant Franciscan, trained in law and theology. He preached throughout northern Italy, including Florence, during the first half of the fifteenth century. As a roving preacher, not tied to Florentine civic life as was Antonino, he could adopt a more objective approach to the Commune's various financial initiatives. So, for instance, he aroused negative reaction from his hearers during a sermon in Florence's cathedral when he condemned the dowry fund as usurious. Known as the *Monte delle doti*, this was a fund set up to assist fathers meet the considerable costs associated with their daughters' marriage.

Bernardino regarded usury as evil, plain and simple, and it was a frequent theme of his sermons in Florence and elsewhere. Yet even he could see ways in which the businessman could lend at interest, without committing usury. In the collection of his Lenten sermons which he compiled in 1425, Bernardino examined the concept of time as a justification for the charging of interest. That is, the lender could be said to have lost potential profits during the period of the loan, as he could have found an alternative investment opportunity for the money lent, with some expectation of a financial return. While Bernardino rejected this argument, he did acknowledge the legitimacy of time as a valuable resource that could be sold.

In a society where wealth grew through trade and banking, benefiting both Church and state, Bernardino, while zealous in his condemnation of usury, realised that the law needed to be interpreted in a way that allowed the developing commercial world to function. While giving a sermon in Siena he is reported to have said that 'the rich are necessary to the State, and the poor to the rich'.[264]

But the law was the law and - no matter what an individual preacher might say - some merchants were confused and worried. They believed

[264] John W. Oppel, 'Poggio, San Bernardino of Siena, and the Dialogue On Avarice', *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 4, Studies in the Renaissance Issue (Winter, 1977), pp. 564-587.

that breaking the law could lead to catastrophic consequences for them in the afterlife. One Florentine, Angelo Corbinelli, noted in his will dated 1419 that his conscience was troubled by the possibility that he might have sinned through the loans he was compelled to make to the Commune. He was not helped by the fact that 'highly judicious masters and theologians hold contrary opinions on this question'.[265]

Such doubts benefited the Church, as merchants sought to make restitution for possible transgressions of the usury laws by making big donations to the very clergy who had planted those doubts in the first place. An extreme example was Cosimo de Medici who, burdened by guilt over his usurious activities, gifted 36,000 florins in 'conscience money' to Florence's Observant Dominicans.

Of course, the sacrament of confession was available to those who desired personal guidance and forgiveness. However even the clergy needed help in determining whether or not a penitent was guilty of usury. Manuals were available to instruct confessors in the appropriate treatment of a variety of possible sins. Among the most popular of these manuals was the *Confessionale pro instructione confessorum* written by Girolamo Savonarola, later to become ruler of Florence. He was an Observant Dominican, who delivered fiery sermons to congregations of up to 15,000 at the church of San Marco in the city. In his sermons, he criticised Florentines for their conspicuous affluence, reflected in the increasingly grand homes which they had built for themselves. Yet, like Antonino, Bernardino and other mendicants mentioned above, he could be flexible in his judgement of what constituted usury. For instance, in the *Confessionale* he concurred with Bernardino's definition of a time-based rationale for imposing interest, criticising only the levying of an excessive charge by the lender.

By the end of the fifteenth century the Church's ban on usury was approaching a point where, as Shakespeare wrote, it was 'more honor'd in the breach than the observance'. Prosecutions of suspected usurers at Florence's ecclesiastical court declined significantly during the second half of the century. As I have outlined above, even Florence's greatest clerics could not sustain a blanket condemnation of a practice that was embedded deeply in the city's social and commercial life. This became inescapably clear in 1495, when the Florentine government authorised the setting up of a new fund, known as the *Monte di pietà*, to lend to the city's poor. The initiative was intended to curtail the activities of Jewish moneylenders who were charging high rates of interest on their loans. The new *monte*, to be funded by charitable donations, would offer loans at between five and ten per cent interest.

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[265] Lawrin Armstrong, 'Usury: Six Texts (1161-1419)', in Katherine Ludwig Jansen, Joanna H. Drell, and Frances Andrews (eds), *Medieval Italy: Texts in Translation* (Pennsylvania, 2009).

The city's Dominicans objected to this blatant violation of the Church's anti-usury stance, but the Franciscans supported the plan. In 1515, the Church rejected arguments that the *Monti di pietà* (in Florence and elsewhere) promoted usury and formally approved these schemes in a decree of the Fifth Lateran Council. It would be wrong to say that this led to the immediate overturning of the Church's traditional position on usury. However, as its overall authority waned in the face of a vigorous Reformation movement, the practical impact of its prohibition went into irreversible decline.

By the time Florence began to develop as an economic powerhouse, the Church had already watered down Jesus' antipathy towards wealth. Its theologians turned instead to the manner in which wealth was acquired and the motives behind such acquisition. Even there, they had to face the realities of the new world of international commerce and accept that land was not the only means to riches. Insofar as any conflict remained between Christian principles and commercial life in Renaissance Florence, it came to centre on the issue of usury. It was mendicant orders, like the Dominicans and the Franciscans, who tried to bridge the ever-increasing gap between ecclesiastical theory and financial reality.

In the end, commercial interests won and the ban on usury, the final remnant of the Church's erstwhile opposition to Mammon, faded into irrelevance.

FREDERICK RYAN: "A RELIABLY AWKWARD SOCIALIST"

First published: 09 April 2022

Why did socialism never take off in Ireland? Perhaps it never took off anywhere – not counting the warped versions of socialism that blighted so many lives during the 20th century.

Mainly because of Joseph Stalin's tyrannical rule over the former Soviet Union, socialism is now synonymous with dictatorship and totalitarian control. But other voices on the left have promoted quite a different form of socialism, one centred on the person rather than on the state.

George Orwell, the author of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, was a socialist who fought against the fascist rebellion during the Spanish Civil War. Yet he was driven out of Spain by the Soviet-backed Communists because he valued personal liberty over submission to centralised dogma.

Like Orwell, Dublin-born writer, Frederick Ryan (1873-1913) believed in freedom of expression. While researching the early life of James Connolly, I came across one of Ryan's articles and was immediately impressed. I wrote a commentary on that article in 2016 and it is published now for the first time in *History in the Making.*

* * *

Long before he marched out one April morning to launch the 1916 Rising with Patrick Pearse, James Connolly edited *The Workers' Republic*. This was the official organ of the Irish Socialist Republican Party (ISRP), which Connolly founded in 1896.

Aside from the standard anti-capitalist rhetoric, the newspaper included articles on Irish economic and social issues, some written by Connolly, others by fellow-socialists. Among the latter was 27-year-old Frederick Ryan who, in addition to his socialist connections, was part of the literary circle around poet W. B. Yeats.

Ryan died in his late-thirties before his promise as an author could be fully realised. It is perhaps a measure of the esteem in which Connolly held his young associate that he allocated two-thirds of the July 1901 edition of *The Workers' Republic* to an 8-page article entitled 'The economic future of Ireland', with the author's name printed at the end simply as 'F. Ryan'.[266] Apart from the quality of the prose, what comes through most clearly in the writing is its open-minded, philosophical tone. If Connolly's own articles sometimes suggested that the author was shouting to make his message heard, Ryan's piece comes across as quieter and

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[266] *The Workers' Republic*, Jul. 1901, vol. 4, no. 28. Connolly's colleague, William O'Brien, donated his collection of *The Workers' Republic* to the National Library of Ireland. He wrote the full names of the authors of many unsigned or partially-signed articles in the margins of his copies, including the edition here cited. See Virginia E. Glandon, *Arthur Griffith and the advanced-nationalist press, Ireland, 1900-1922* (New York, 1985), p. 33. fn. 98.

more reflective.

In his article Ryan made it clear that he was not aiming to preach to the converted, i.e. fellow socialists. He was addressing the political class, nationalist and unionist alike, on the assumption that they pursued their opposing policies in the honest belief that they would "benefit the people and make their lives richer, fuller, and happier". Ryan placed this goal above all others, including native culture, national sovereignty, and even "spiritual progress". "For it is idle", he observed, "to contend that a man's moral and intellectual nature is independent of, or is unaffected by, his material surroundings." Having established a common, rational basis for discourse with his opponents, Ryan moved on to discuss the iniquities of the current economic system.

While his analysis drew on stock socialist concepts of predatory capitalism and ground-down masses, he instanced a surprising benefit to Ireland of English rule. His country "ha[d] been spared to a great extent that factory system which is the commercial glory and the social curse of England". The Industrial Revolution had barely touched Ireland. As a result, the economy was based almost wholly on agriculture. Consequently, Ryan argued, reforming Ireland's economic system must centre on the land question, with nationalisation as "the only real and permanent settlement". Before we consider his views on this topic, let us look at what was happening in Ireland in the years before independence.

Beginning in 1870, a series of legislative measures by the British government led to the transfer in ownership of most of Ireland's agricultural land from a relatively small number of proprietor landlords to a much greater number of tenant farmers. In less than a half-century, the proportion of land-owning rural-dwellers rose from 3% to almost 64%, with more than 11 million acres changing hands. This was, in the words of one historian, "a social revolution".[267]

However, not all nationalists were in favour of this policy, most notably a prominent land agitator named Michael Davitt. Davitt founded the Irish Land League in 1878 as a vehicle for protest on behalf of tenant farmers. Reflecting the views of an earlier Irish nationalist, James Fintan Lalor, Davitt argued for a system whereby the land would become "the national property of Ireland", with the land-holder paying a tax in lieu of rent.[268] In taking this position, Davitt was also echoing American economist Henry George's doctrine that land is a community rather than an individual asset. However, Davitt's ideas were disregarded and a policy of 'peasant proprietorship' prevailed.

Once the transfers of ownership got underway, Connolly's ISRP was one of the few voices continuing to call for land nationalisation, and they

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[267] Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (London, 2005), pp 62-3.
[268] *Liverpool Mercury*, 7 Jun. 1882.

did not have many allies. This was not helped by the denunciations of Davitt himself that appeared from time to time in *The Workers' Republic*. Apparently Davitt was too equivocal on the issue for the paper's liking. But perhaps Connolly's sensitivity is understandable. The growth in tenant proprietorship posed a serious challenge to the ISRP, neatly encapsulated by an historian of the land wars.

> A nation predominately of farmers, Ireland was now dominated by small capitalist peasant proprietors, their interests distinctly different from when they had been tenants, and their outlook now generally freed them from the traditional bane of their lives, rent-demanding and in other ways interfering landlords. Their concerns were now primarily focused on improving their agricultural efficiency and productivity.[269]

In short, a significant proportion of the Irish people was establishing a vested interest in the status quo; they were not likely to support radical change. By the time Ryan's article was published, land nationalisation must have seemed like a hopeless cause. Yet he argued for it valiantly.

Wisely he opened his case by accepting a key element of the opposing argument, i.e. that "peasant proprietary for a time may be a better deal than the old form of landlordism… [and] may for a time work admirably". However, from a national viewpoint, he saw the policy as problematic. Ryan argued that it merely replaced a small number of Anglo-Irish landlords with a larger number of native ones. These would be entitled to buy and sell land creating the possibility that this valuable national resource would at some future time fall into the hands of "syndicates of capitalists".

His next plank rested on the moral argument outlined by Fintan Lalor and Henry George. It was as wrong for a man to own land, Ryan submitted, as it would be for him "to claim the sea or the air". These natural resources, he continued, belonged to the nation as a whole and not to a favoured few. However, it was in his third point that Ryan got to the heart of the problem from the socialist viewpoint.

The peasant proprietors were being drawn 'into a support of the competitive regime by being made to imagine that their interests are in some way or other bound up with that regime'. In making this charge, Ryan was perhaps unconsciously paraphrasing British policy as pronounced by the recently-departed Chief Secretary of Ireland, Gerald Balfour. In 1895 Balfour described government strategy towards Ireland as "killing home rule with kindness". Irish socialists such as Ryan must have feared that the land reforms would eradicate support for more radical expressions of nationalism. Nevertheless, Ryan concluded his case with two final points, neither likely to convince anyone unmoved by his previous arguments.

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[269] Philip Bull, *Land, politics and nationalism: a study of the Irish land question* (Dublin, 1996), p. 173.

Firstly he made a plea on behalf of the labourers employed by the farmers; they would gain nothing from the government's measures. If Ryan intended this to appeal to his readers' sense of fair play, his final point was more of a warning. In the United States technology was transforming agriculture into an intensive industry against which the individual Irish farmer could never hope to compete.

Although a socialist, Ryan was not a dogmatic one. His article encompassed the spiritual and material, the urban and the rural, unionism and nationalism, self-sufficiency and international trade. Capitalism might be evil, he observed, but its proponents were fallible human beings, just like the workers they exploited. All had their faults and foibles. Such vision is not indicative of someone enslaved by any –ism.

Ryan's appeal for reason and honest debate in resolving Ireland's problems seems especially heartfelt.

> Real thought is more important than mere parrot-like adherents for it is only by real thought that real progress can be made… Personally I am not so enamoured of any reform or any opinion as to blind myself to what can be urged against it… I plead therefore for thought.

Given such unusual open-mindedness, historian Roy Foster's description of Frederick Ryan as a 'reliably awkward socialist' hits the target I believe.[270]

Alice Milligan, promoter of community-based industries, Fr. Thomas Finlay, advocate of Catholic social teaching, and co-operative pioneer, Horace Plunkett, were just three other writers and thinkers who, at the turn of the 20th century, imagined how Ireland might develop one day as a free nation. The details of their economic analyses differed from each other's, and from those of Frederick Ryan. Nonetheless I believe all four would have agreed on one important principle: Ireland should not follow Britain down the path of unbridled capitalism.

In the *Workers' Republic* article Ryan outlined his own vision. I can't imagine any of his contemporaries disagreeing.

> If the Ireland of my dreams became the Ireland of fact, though it might not leave behind a record of empire such as Rome has left or England will leave, it would do something mightier and something more…The Ireland of my ideal, in short, would not be a second England. It would on the contrary be a country in which there were healthy men and healthy women, strong of body, active of mind, pure of heart.

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[270] R. F. Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland, 1890-1923* (London, 2014), p. 49.

VIRUSES, VARIOLATION & VACCINES (PART 1): "UNCHARTERED TERRITORY"?

First published: 06 March 2022

On Thursday March 12th 2020, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar delivered perhaps the most important speech of his political career. He had arrived in Washington DC a few days before St. Patrick's Day for the annual shamrock ceremony with President Trump. But Varadkar's speech was not directed at an American audience. His listeners were at home in Ireland and his message had nothing to do with the national feast day.

"I need to speak to you about Coronavirus and Covid-19", he began. The day before, March 11th, the World Health Authority (WHO) had classified Covid-19 as a worldwide pandemic. So we were about to hear how Ireland would respond to this news.

In his remarks delivered outside Blair House where he was staying, Varadkar announced a series of restrictions on Irish citizens' freedom of movement that amounted to "big changes in the way we live our lives". These included lockdowns, working from home, and social distancing. But the biggest bombshell of all came when Varadkar told us that "Schools, colleges, and childcare facilities will close from tomorrow".[271]

One Irish journalist went out on a limb, pointing out a couple of oddities in the Taoiseach's address. Why did he not consult his cabinet colleagues before imposing "the most stringent limitation on human activity ordered by a government in this State since World War II"? Indeed how was it that Varadkar retained the political authority to make such an earth-shattering announcement in the first place? His party had lost 12 seats in a general election a month earlier, garnering fewer votes than either Fianna Fail or Sinn Fein. The same reporter described this outcome as, "the first time in history that Fine Gael was not one of the two largest parties in the country".[272]

Interesting questions, even though the answers are still not apparent. But surely the biggest anomaly of all was Varadkar's decision to close schools overnight? "Tomorrow" was Friday, a day that parents and teachers must have expected would be like any other weekday, with the kids in school while many parents were out working. Instead Varadkar's announcement triggered "mass panic", as shoppers filled the supermarkets and grocery stores in a desperate bid to load up on supplies before the 'apocalypse' descended.

Why did the Taoiseach not defer the decision to close schools until the following Monday? That would have allowed everyone to finish out the week as normal, leaving a couple of days for working parents to make alternative child-minding arrangements. But would such a delay have in-

[271] *Irish Times*, 13 Mar. 2020.
[272] *Irish Examiner*, 14 Mar. 2020.

duced the sense of fear and bewilderment which, from that moment on, gripped the hearts and minds of Irish citizens? Of course not.

Varadkar began as he has continued, maintaining and feeding public anxiety to a level that has made it possible for government to impose even greater restrictions on personal freedoms than most of us could have imagined two years ago - compulsory mask-wearing and vaccine passports being the most extraordinary. We were told that these unprecedented measures were taken in order to defeat a virus that, as I outlined in an earlier article, had an imperceptible impact on the country in 2020.[273]

In his Washington speech the Taoiseach claimed that "we have not witnessed a pandemic of this nature in living memory. This is unchartered (sic) territory."[274] "Living memory" perhaps - but "unchartered territory"?

The Great Famine had a devastating effect on Ireland and its people during the 1840s. But it was not the only ordeal that afflicted the country during the 19th century. There was also smallpox. It was, according to a modern commentator, a

> highly infectious disease… feared and loathed in Ireland and elsewhere because of its disfiguring effects and relatively high mortality rate, often around 20%.[275]

This was a time before Ireland had its own government. The country was then part of the UK and ruled by the British parliament in Westminster. There were no mass communications to allow official bulletins to reach everyone at the same time. Vaccines were in their infancy and viruses were largely unknown to medical science.

So how did politicians, the medical fraternity, and the media deal with smallpox a century-and-a-half ago? What measures were taken? How were they communicated to the people and how did the people respond? I will address these and related questions in Part 2.

VIRUSES, VARIOLATION & VACCINES (PART 2): COVID OR SMALLPOX?

First published: 20 March 2022

Even though smallpox is to all intents and purposes extinct, it has been creeping back into the spotlight lately. Since March 2020, when the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared Covid-19 to be a worldwide pandemic, everyone keeps talking about smallpox.

It is as if smallpox were one of those horror movie villains who is never quite dead despite having been stabbed, shot, or blown up. We can never be certain that the monster won't come back from the dead to destroy us.

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[273] Divided Nation: Ireland in 2021 on page 125.
[274] *Irish Times*, 13 Mar. 2020.
[275] Laurence Geary, 'Vaccination in Ireland: The evolution of a process', *History Ireland*, 29/6, Nov/Dec 2021, pp. 28-31.

And if the monster really is dead, maybe his second cousin or illegitimate son will take up where he left off.

Is that why smallpox is mentioned constantly in relation to Covid? To persuade us that there is a connection between the two diseases? A very frightening connection? Among the political voices recently urging people to get vaccinated against Covid was Fianna Fáil senator, Malcolm Byrne. In a newspaper report he was quoted as saying:

> We need to think of all the horrible diseases that we don't see now, from smallpox to polio, and that is because of vaccines.[276]

It is not just politicos. Another example is this from Professor Mary Horgan, president of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland:

> Vaccination programmes have saved millions of lives since their inception more than two centuries ago following Edward Jenner's scientific observation that the cowpox virus protected against smallpox.[277]

When I was a youngster it was routine for children to be jabbed in the arm as a defence against a number of potentially deadly ailments like TB. What I did not know at the time is that it all started with smallpox. Not that smallpox was the first incidence of a major transmissible disease. But in two important respects it is unique. Firstly, as the author of a history of smallpox has noted, it is "the only disease that mankind has so far succeeded in wiping off the face of the planet". Not only that, but, as the same writer points out, "It was smallpox that triggered the discovery of vaccination."[278]

In May 1980 the WHO announced to the world that smallpox had finally been eradicated. The man who led the campaign against the disease was an Ohio-born medical doctor named Donald Henderson. In an article marking what the journal editor referred to as "a truly epochal event", Henderson made it clear that this achievement was a one-off.

> I now see no other candidate disease for global eradication – no other disease with the appropriate combination of severity and suitable epidemiologic characteristics and for which we have appropriate and affordable technology to permit eradication.[279]

In other words, smallpox would not be joined by malaria, leprosy, syphilis, etc., in the roll-call of defunct diseases. And so, to this day, smallpox stands alone. So what exactly is (or was) smallpox?

When the Black Death or Bubonic Plague faded away in the 17th century, smallpox replaced it as "the most dreaded of all diseases".[280] Although smallpox was around long before then, no one knows how, where,

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[276] *Gorey Guardian*, 4 Jan. 2022.
[277] *Irish Examiner*, 8 Dec. 2020.
[278] Gareth Williams, *Angel of Death: The story of Smallpox* (Basingstoke, 2010), pp. xviii-xix.
[279] D. A. Henderson, 'Smallpox Eradication', *Public Health Reports* (1974-), 95/5 (Sep-Oct., 1980), p. 424.
[280] Frederick F. Cartwright, *A social history of medicine* (London 1977), p. 75.

or when it originated. The earliest evidence of its origins is to be found in the remains of Egyptian pharaoh Rameses V who, if he did not die of smallpox, seems to have had the disease judging by the pockmarks found on his mummified face. On the other hand, the absence of any mention of smallpox in New Testament accounts of Jesus healing diseases (like leprosy for instance), suggests that it was not as virulent or as widespread an infection then as it later became.

Tracing the history of smallpox involves a lot of speculation. The similar rash found in cases of measles and chicken pox makes it virtually impossible to distinguish retrospectively one disease from another. It was only towards the close of the 17th century that smallpox itself began to be recorded as a significant threat to life and limb. During the century that followed the disease had a devastating impact on Europe:

> The contemporary physician Rosen von Rosenstein stated that smallpox every year killed one-tenth of all Swedish children in their first year of life. With the possible exception of infantile diarrhoea, small pox had become the greatest natural check upon an uncontrolled rise in population.[281]

It was not just children who could catch smallpox. Young and old, rich and poor, kings and commoners, were all susceptible. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and George Washington were two notable survivors of smallpox. The heir to the Portuguese throne, Prince José, was not so fortunate. He died of smallpox in 1788 at the age of 27.

Many of those who recovered from smallpox were left with life-changing injuries. A distressing symptom of this disease was the terrible rash that erupted on the patient's face. Those who did not succumb to the infection were often left with a multitude of pockmarks that disfigured their appearance, more so even than a bad case of acne. Some were so traumatised when they finally looked in a mirror that they committed suicide. Gareth Williams describes the aftermath of infection:

> Unlucky survivors of smallpox had to confront the horror of a rough pitted mask with their eyelids stripped out - a face that, a month earlier, would have made them turn away in disgust - and the realisation that this was how they and the world would see them for as long as they lived.[282]

Native Americans had their own name for this unwanted 'gift' from across the seas. They called it "rotting face".[283]

Do you now find yourself agreeing with Senator Byrne in that quote at the top of this article? Are you, like me, shuddering with relief that we do not live at a time when smallpox is an ever-present danger? Imagine developing those horrible pustules on your face, knowing that you might either die or suffer terrible scarring for life. It makes our present troubles seem mild by comparison, doesn't it?

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281 Ibid, p. 78.
282 Williams, *Angel of Death*, pp. 33-4.
283 quoted in ibid, p. 2.

But what if smallpox were not just a relic of the past, like the dodo, of interest only to anthropologists and historians? Can we imagine a scenario where, rather than Covid, it was a revived and virulent form of smallpox that precipitated the worldwide pandemic declared two years ago? Could the official response across the planet have been any harsher?

It is hard to imagine measures more stringent than those we have seen. The quarantining of entire populations, the enforcement of face-masks on adults and children, the necessity of vaccine passports to eat in restaurants or travel abroad, these are among the restrictions many of us have lived with in recent times. In Ireland, the authorities took these drastic steps because of what they stated to be "the immediate, exceptional and manifest risk posed to human life and public health by the spread of Covid-19".

We could blame the government for being over-zealous in its approach to the pandemic, but nothing more than that surely? We might even excuse our leaders for their excessive caution in dealing with a threat that was outside their experience. Yet from the start, as I argued previously, governments seemed more intent on promoting public fear than saving lives.[284] In Ireland, for example, senior politicians and officials exaggerated the number of Covid fatalities to make the disease seem far more deadly than it was. Nevertheless, as 2020 gave way to 2021, the screws were tightened further - despite the lack of evidence of an "immediate, exceptional and manifest risk… to human life and public health".

In short, our government behaved as if today's pandemic was as dangerous as yesterday's smallpox. The official response to Covid was out of all proportion to the actual threat to citizens. Covid-19 is not smallpox – far from it. But if people were persuaded that it could be as dangerous, they would do virtually anything to avoid it, wouldn't they?

So the authorities applied our 21st-century pharmaceutical, communications, and legal machinery to combat a fictitious foe created for one reason and one reason only: to instil such fear and confusion in the public mind that people would trade their liberty for safety. The fictitious foe may have been called Covid, but it was really smallpox reborn - or at least its shadow.

VIRUSES, VARIOLATION & VACCINES (PART 3): "A FOOL-HARDY AND DANGEROUS EXPERIMENT"

First published: 23 April 2022

In Part 2, I outlined how smallpox devastated individual lives and whole societies before it was finally eradicated in the late-20th century. I concluded that article by describing Covid-19 as "smallpox reborn - or at least

[284] Divided Nation: Ireland in 2021 on page 125, and Fírinne an scéil ("The truth of the matter") on page 114.

its shadow". I find it interesting that the entire Covid edifice appears to have been based on the smallpox story. It is as if smallpox was used as a template by those behind the 'Covid project', especially in the way vaccines have been pushed by virtually every part of the establishment. But before vaccines there was variolation, and that is where we begin.

Three hundred years ago people were not dependent on radios, televisions, or smartphones for news of the outside world. Their understanding of the ravages of smallpox came not from electronic devices, nor from the utterances of politicians and government officials, but from what they saw all around them. As a 19th-century historian reflected:

> The smallpox was always present, filling the churchyards with corpses, tormenting with constant fears all whom it had stricken, leaving on those whose lives it spared the hideous traces of its power, turning the babe into a changeling at which the mother shuddered, and making the eyes and cheeks of the bighearted maiden objects of horror to the lover.[285]

People back then must have believed there was no escape from smallpox, that sooner or later everyone would get it. The prevailing state of mind was captured by a contributor to the multi-volume *Encyclopédie* published in France in the mid-18th century. In his article 'Inoculation', the author quoted Charles Marie de La Condamine's description of the disease as

> an imposed lottery in which we find ourselves interested in spite of ourselves: each of us has his/her ticket, the longer it takes to draw our number, the greater the danger.[286]

Just imagine waiting for the day when your number would almost inevitably come up. But this was a prize no one wanted to win. So maybe the odds could be lengthened?

In order to circumvent the worst effects of the disease the rich and the poor deliberately infected themselves and/or their children with smallpox. They did this in the belief that a) not only would they survive the resulting infection but it would be mild and leave no scars, and b) they would gain lifelong immunity from any further infection.

The process was similar to the horticultural practice of inoculation, i.e. grafting a bud from one plant to another. Indeed the word 'inoculation' was often used to describe this self-infection procedure. But the correct term is 'variolation' after *variola*, the Latin word for smallpox. Variolation involved transferring some diseased matter from an infected person into or onto the subject's body. This could be done through an incision in the

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[285] T. B. Macauley, *The History of England from the Accession of James II*, quoted in Gavin Weightman, *The Great Inoculator: The Untold Story of Daniel Sutton and His Medical Revolution* (New Haven, CT, 2020), p. xiii.

[286] 'Inoculation' (tr. Antoinette Emch-Deriaz) in *The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project*. [http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.did2222.0000.954], 22 Apr. 2022.

arm, by blowing dried smallpox pustules into the nostrils, or by rubbing infected material against the skin.

Strangely there is no record of a similar approach being adopted with other dreaded diseases, like leprosy, syphilis, rabies, or even bubonic plague (otherwise known as the Black Death). Yes, parents induced in their children less serious ailments like chickenpox or mumps in order to ward off future problems - but smallpox?

> A modern historian has summed up the unique nature of variolation:
> Variolation is such a huge affront to common sense that it is difficult to think of anyone coming up with the idea, let alone being foolish enough to try it out. Smallpox was feared and loathed in every culture because what it did to people was cruel and revolting. This makes it all the more incredible that anyone would deliberately collect pus or scabs from a smallpox victim and use this material to infect someone who had been lucky enough to escape the attention of the Angel of Death.[287]

There are no hard facts about the origins of variolation, only speculation - lots of it. Some say variolation was born out of a mysterious process of alchemical magic. Others suggest that the idea was conveyed to the mind of its progenitor in a dream. Perhaps unsurprisingly a financial angle has also been mooted. Smallpox could deplete slave traders' profits if it destroyed the lives or the appearance of their human 'merchandise'. One theory is that variolation was invented in order to prevent a financial loss to this otherwise vibrant 'business'.

Depending on which story you prefer, the practice of variolation spread to Europe either from the Orient or the Middle East, reaching Britain and Ireland early in the 18th century. While the well-heeled could afford to have their physicians add variolation to their armoury of potions and other remedies, the poorer sections of society turned to travelling lay inoculators who performed the necessary procedure for a small fee. In fact this type of commercial transaction was the most common means for ordinary folk to be inoculated, in Ireland and elsewhere, hence the widely-used expression: 'buying the pocks'.[288]

During its 18th-century heyday, variolation or 'buying the pocks' was seen by most people as a boon to humanity. The British king George II's own doctor, Richard Mead, was one of the many members of his profession who gave their backing to the practice. In one of his memoirs, Mead drew on his own clinical experience to argue that "the inoculated is safer than the natural small pox".[289] The anonymous author of the article on 'Inoculation' in the *Encyclopédie* agreed. He argued that for "anyone who has never had this disease [and who] runs a very great risk of catching it and of dying from it", there was no better means "to escape this

[287] Gareth Williams, *Angel of Death: The story of Smallpox* (Basingstoke, 2010), p. 58.
[288] Arthur M. Goldstein, *A history of immunology* (San Diego, 1989), p. 12.
[289] Richard Mead, *A discourse on the small pox and measles* (London, 1748), p. 95.

danger…than inoculation".[290] Another English physician, Edward Jenner (of whom more anon), acknowledged "the happy effects of Inoculation", having been inoculated himself as a child.[291]

For its champions, the lifesaving potential of variolation was a big selling point. Richard Mead maintained "that scarce one in a hundred dies by the inoculated small pox; whereas many more in proportion are destroyed by the ordinary disease".[292] Several observers at the time asserted that the rise in the British population during the latter part of the 18th century was due to the widespread practice of inoculation in that country.[293] Before variolation became accepted in France, one local advocate estimated that the widespread application of the procedure "would save the life [sic] of twelve or thirteen hundred citizens per year in just one city (Paris), and of more than twenty-five thousand in the kingdom".[294]

Today variolation is important for a very different reason - it was the precursor to the smallpox vaccine. Without the smallpox vaccine there would be none of the other vaccines that have proliferated in the 20th and 21st centuries - including the several Covid vaccines.

But how were ordinary people persuaded to accept variolation in the first place, described above as "a huge affront to common sense"? Even the enlightened minds behind the 18th-century *Encyclopédie* found the concept of variolation hard to take:

> If inoculation had never been practiced, and if someone proposed to make its first trial, this idea would appear very odd, bizarre, repulsive, of very doubtful success, a fool-hardy and dangerous experiment.[295]

Was it fear of possible death or disfigurement that propelled so many to infect not only themselves but their children too? Some perhaps. But even before variolation was supplanted by vaccination, another factor was being brought into play.

At the end of his long article in the *Encyclopédie*, the unknown contributor considered whether "a law to compel fathers to inoculate their children" would be necessary to satisfy "the public good". Despite his conclusion that "encouragement and example would suffice", an association between medical treatment and legal sanction was being mooted in a public forum.[296] In England that link was already moving from theory into practice. There local authorities paid for their poor to be inoculated be-

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290 'Inoculation' in *The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert*.
291 Edward Jenner, *An inquiry into the causes and effects of the variolae vaccinae* (London, 1798), p. 66.
292 Mead, *A discourse*, p. 89.
293 P. E. Razzell, 'Population change in eighteenth-century England: A reappraisal', in Michael Drake (ed.), *Population in industrialization* (London, 1969), p. 150.
294 'Inoculation' in *The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert*.
295 Ibid.
296 Ibid.

cause it was cheaper than the expense of caring for them if they became ill with smallpox. However we are told that in many instances the parish authorities compelled "everyone within their jurisdiction to be inoculated".[297]

These were the first signs of a tendency that continued through the 19th century, reaching its apogee during the last two years. That tendency was for the state to exert tight control over the medical decisions of its citizens, to a degree that has astonished and dismayed many.

VIRUSES, VARIOLATION & VACCINES (PART 4): EDWARD JENNER'S "INCREDIBLE GIFT" TO THE WORLD

First published: 08 May 2022

Dr Edward Jenner (1749-1823) is acclaimed to this day as the "father of vaccination". For most of the 19th century, his vaccine was presented as the sole officially-approved method of stopping smallpox.[298]

In 1798 Jenner published an account of the research that led to his discovery of vaccination.[299] In it he asserted that smallpox stemmed from too close an association between human and animal, or to use scientific parlance, he believed the disease to be zoonotic. While Jenner pinpointed the immediate culprit as the farmyard cow, he claimed that it actually originated in a disease of the domesticated horse. Known colloquially as "the Grease", the chief symptom of this equine ailment was a "swelling in the heel", from which oozed contaminated pus. To Jenner's eyes this pus looked so similar to that produced on the bodies of smallpox victims "that I think it highly probable it may be the source of that disease".[300]

Jenner suspected that the disease reached humans as a result of farmhands carrying the pus from horse to cow. If a dairy maid collected milk from an affected cow, she then became infected herself and passed on the disease to everyone else on the farm. However, by then it had mutated into a relatively benign form known as cowpox and its victims usually made a full recovery.

One of his modern-day admirers has written that, during the research period, "Jenner was in a hurry and cut corners".[301] Perhaps that explains why, if zoonotic transference invariably resulted in the *milder* cowpox he described, Jenner did not explain how the *full-blown* version of smallpox came to affect its victims as I described in Part 2.

In any event, Jenner went public with his theory that inoculating with

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297 Razzell, 'Population change', p. 139.
298 The term 'vaccination' was derived from the title of Jenner's book and comes from *vacca*, the Latin word for cow. (see below)
299 Jenner, V*ariolae vaccinae* (London, 1798).
300 Ibid, pp. 1-2.
301 Williams, *Angel of Death*, p. 198.

cowpox matter would confer the same protection against smallpox as the traditional variolation procedure. Before outlining how Jenner tested this hypothesis, I need to provide a little more background.

Although it was regarded as preferable to contracting smallpox naturally, variolation was not risk-free. It was believed that those who went through the procedure could still end up with the full-blown infection, resulting in death or life-changing injuries. It was thought also that a recently-inoculated person could pass the disease on to others. One historian put it like this:

> Unless practised under strict quarantine, the operation [i.e. variolation] was as likely to start an epidemic as to stop one.[302]

But even if variolation did not prove fatal for the subject, the immediate after-effects could be nasty. Dr Richard Mead described a young girl whom he inoculated in 1721 by inserting "into her nostrils a tent wetted with matter taken out of ripe pustules". The patient recovered but, as Mead related in his memoir, she

> suffered much…being, immediately after the poison was received into the nose, miserably tormented with sharp pains in her head, and a fever, which never left her till the eruption of the pustules.[303]

As I mentioned last time, Edward Jenner was variolated against smallpox as a boy. Although he later wrote of the "happy effects" of the procedure, he could not have been referring to his own experience, which one of his friends later lambasted as "barbarism". The eight-year-old Jenner underwent the painful treatment while at school. Although he never contracted smallpox, he attributed problems with his long-term health to that experience of variolation.

> as a child, he could never enjoy sleep, and was constantly haunted by imaginary noises; and a sensibility too acutely alive to these and sudden jars has ever since subsisted.[304]

Much later, as a physician practising in rural Gloucestershire, Jenner decided to test his theory about the origins of smallpox by experimenting on his gardener's eight-year-old son, James Phipps. According to Jenner's account of the experiment, he cut two incisions in the boy's arm and inserted under the skin "matter…taken from a sore on the hand of a dairy-maid" named Sarah Nelmes. Nelmes had become "infected with the Cow Pox" a short time previously as a consequence of her job on a nearby farm.[305]

After about a week Phipps developed a sore arm and could not eat or

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[302] Elizabeth A. Fenn, 'The Great Smallpox Epidemic', *History Today*, 53/8, August 2003 [https://www.historytoday.com/archive/great-smallpox-epidemic], 2 May 2022.
[303] Mead, S*mall pox and measles*, pp. 88-9.
[304] Thomas Dudley Fosbroke, 'Biographical Anecdotes of Edward Jenner, M.D., F.R.S., &c.', in *Berkeley Manuscripts: Abstracts and Extracts of Smyth's Lives of the Berkeleys* (London, 1821), pp. 221-2.
[305] Jenner, *An inquiry*, pp. 32-4.

sleep. However, he recovered quickly and about six weeks later Jenner inoculated him again, this time with smallpox pus. Jenner gave the boy a third inoculation after a few more months, again with smallpox matter, before concluding that his theory must be correct. As he put it in his published findings:

> What renders the Cow-pox virus so extremely singular, is, that the person who has been thus affected is for ever after secure from the infection of the Small Pox; neither exposure to the variolous effluvia, nor the insertion of the matter into the skin, producing this distemper.[306]

James Phipps, or "poor Phipps" as Jenner referred to him, never stopped being a 'guinea pig'. By the time he reached adulthood, Phipps had undergone the variolation procedure no less than 20 times - as Jenner observed: "all without effect".[307] What Jenner meant of course was that Phipps never contracted smallpox, despite the many attempts to infect him with the disease. But if Jenner himself was left with lifelong health problems as a result of his one experience of variolation, it is unlikely that Phipps escaped unscathed from his multiple exposures to the same procedure.

Perhaps Jenner's allusions to the adult Phipps suffering from "tubercles of the lungs" and having been "very ill", indicate some of the more serious after-effects. Whatever the truth, a few years before he died, Jenner had a cottage built to house Phipps and his young family.[308] Was this a gesture of gratitude to a faithful ally in the battle against a dreaded disease, or an attempt by Jenner to salve his own guilty conscience?

It can be difficult to see behind the revered legacy of a man like Edward Jenner who, right up to the present, is singled out for lavish praise.[309] However occasionally the sources reveal insights that paint a more sinister picture. Here are three that stick in my mind.

1. When his eldest son was ill, Jenner applied the then-common medical practice of bleeding his young patient to rid his body of whatever ailed him. While most physicians at the time would have done the same, Jenner went one step further by burying the blood he had extracted at the root of a willow tree growing in his garden.[310]
2. On display in Jenner's coach-house was the hide of the farm animal from which Sarah Nelmes contracted her cow pox, which its owner

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306 Ibid, p. 6.
307 John Baron, *The life of Edward Jenner* (2 vols, London, 1838), ii. p. 304.
308 Ibid, pp. 304-5.
309 In a recent speech, the director-general of the World Health Organisation referred to Jenner's vaccine: "We all continue to benefit from the incredible gift he gave the world – a gift that has changed the course of history and changed the course of the COVID-19". ('WHO Director-General's keynote speech at the Global Pandemic Preparedness Summit', 8 Mar. 2022 [https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-keynote-speech-at-the-global-pandemic-preparedness-summit], 7 May 2022.)
310 Baron, *Edward Jenner*, ii. pp. 296-7.

kept apparently as a memento of his first vaccination.[311]

3. Then there was the one-room hut that Jenner had built in the grounds of his home. As a visitor later reported, once a week Jenner used this building to administer his vaccine to the local poor.

> It is for this reason I have given my little cottage the name of the Temple of Vaccina; and like a faithful priest, added he, smiling, I am always anxious to find it filled with worshippers.[312]

While this sort of behaviour might seem odd to our eyes, to an active Freemason such as Jenner, these ostensibly ritualistic practices were probably not that strange.[313]

Jenner's idea of using cowpox rather than smallpox may have led to him being hailed as the "father of vaccination", but his discovery did not constitute the breakthrough that such an epithet implies. If the word 'breakthrough' is appropriate at all, it should be applied to variolation itself. The fact that people were willing to subject themselves to a procedure that even its advocates regarded as "repulsive" created the opportunity for Jenner to come up with what he proclaimed to be his safer and equally effective alternative.[314]

If he had tried, Jenner could hardly have picked a better place or time to launch his new discovery than mighty Britain at the turn of the 19th century. He must have realised this because, from the beginning, he was certain that his vaccine would be well-received. In 1800, just two years after publication of his findings, Jenner was expressing his ambition that vaccination would spread "throughout every part of the British Empire".[315] Even 20 years earlier, long before he had finished his cowpox experiments, Jenner anticipated that his discovery would lead "to the total extinction of small-pox".[316] As I related in Part 2, Jenner's prognosis was vindicated when the WHO declared in 1980 that smallpox in its natural state had been eradicated from the planet.

Of course it helped enormously that, from the start, Jenner was backed by many influential people. His conclusions about the efficacy of the vaccine were quickly accepted by the British establishment, including the

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311 Ibid, pp. 303-4.

312 'The Life of Dr. Jenner', *The Analectic Magazine*, Vol. 9, Jan. 1817, p. 57.

313 "Jenner became a Master Mason in 1802 and was a member of the Gloucestershire Lodge of Faith and Friendship #270. He was involved in the fraternity, serving as Master of his lodge in 1812. The Prince of Wales – the future George IV – was a frequent visitor to this lodge, and he would play an important part in Jenner's life. Jenner was selected as King George IV's special physician in 1821." [https://freemasonscommunity.life/masonic-contributions-to-science-medicine/], 8 May 2022.

314 'Inoculation' (tr. Antoinette Emch-Deriaz) in *The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project*. [http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.did2222.0000.954], 22 Apr. 2022.

315 Baron, *Edward Jenner*, i. p. 368.

316 Ibid, i. p. 128.

royal family, senior government leaders, and the medical profession. Prominent among the last mentioned was Dr William Woodville who practised at the Smallpox Hospital in London.

In volume 1 of his planned two-part history of variolation Woodville described that procedure as "a modern art in this country… that now rarely fails of success".[317] Yet, after he had read Jenner's findings a couple of years later, we are told that this champion of variolation became "an energetic ambassador for vaccination", promoting the new method in his subsequent travels around continental Europe.[318]

In a report published in May 1802, a committee of the British parliament issued its official response to Jenner's discovery. Its findings were based on testimonies gathered from aristocrats, physicians, clergymen, public officials, indeed anyone from the establishment who had knowledge or experience of the new vaccine procedure. Their feedback was almost entirely favourable and this was reflected in the report's conclusions:

> [Vaccination] may be safely performed at all times of life…in the earliest infancy, as well as during pregnancy, and in old age; and that it tends to eradicate, and, if its use becomes universal, must absolutely extinguish one of the most destructive disorders by which the human race has been visited.[319]

From the start the political and medical authorities were determined that Jenner's vaccine should become "universal". On July 8th 1806, during a debate in the British House of Commons, speaker after speaker extolled the benefits of the vaccine and deplored the public's hesitancy in adopting Jenner's discovery. Moreover, judging by the remarks made by one member of parliament who participated in that debate, variolation (more so than smallpox itself) was the real enemy.

> it is well known that [variolation] forms a magazine of the most dreadful evils, and that contagion, with all its baneful effects, usually follows. A reference to the bills of mortality will prove this assertion, and show to demonstration, that the number of deaths have been greatly increased since the first discovery of the small pox inoculation [i.e. variolation].[320]

This debate marked a sharp turn in the smallpox story, taking it in a much darker direction. In Part 5 I will explore how Jenner's vaccine was promoted, promulgated, and enforced, in a campaign that prefigured many aspects of the official response to Covid-19.

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[317] William Woodville, *The History of the Inoculation of the Small-pox, in Great Britain* (London, 1796), p. v.
[318] Williams, *Angel of Death*, p. 202.
[319] *Report from the Committee on Dr. Jenner's Petition respecting his discovery of Vaccine Inoculation*, 6 May 1802.
[320] *Hansard*, HC Deb 2 Jul. 1806, vol. 7, col 884.

VIRUSES, VARIOLATION & VACCINES (PART 5): "CONTROL OVER MANKIND". THE LEGACY OF WILLIAM WILBERFORCE

First published: 15 May 2022

As readers of this series will recall, the very idea of variolation has been characterised as "odd", "bizarre", and an "affront to common sense"- not by its detractors, but by admirers past and present.[321] With the advent of the vaccination era the absurdities continued, whether they related to Edward Jenner himself (as we saw last time) or to his discovery.

For instance, although Jenner maintained that smallpox was the result of humanity's getting too close to other creatures, using his vaccine meant strengthening that connection even more. It is difficult to imagine a closer bond between human and animal than having extract of cow inserted into your bloodstream.[322] But where does weirdness end and wickedness begin?

Up to 1800, as I outlined in previous instalments, variolation (or inoculation with smallpox) was seen by medical and lay folk alike as a boon to mankind. Now those behind the vaccine wanted the procedure banned.

I argued in Part 4 that Jenner was fortunate in both the timing and the location of his discovery. England's legal jurisdiction may have been limited to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. But its status and influence reached far beyond its own geographical boundaries. England ruled over extensive colonial possessions in almost every part of the world. It was well on the way to ending the threat posed by its great rival, France. On top of that, England's Industrial Revolution was transforming society in ways that reverberate to this day.

If, as a medical historian has observed, England had become "the international centre for variolation" by the end of the 18th century, it was now the hub of the worldwide vaccine revolution.[323] An important element of this revolution was the legislation passed at Westminster, the so-called 'mother of parliaments'.

Last time I cited a House of Commons debate about Jenner's vaccine. That debate took place on July 8th 1806, only a few years after the vaccine had been launched. Although the British establishment was behind Jenner's discovery, one member of parliament (MP) seemed worried about the public's continued preference for variolation over vaccination. As the debate continued, a resolution of this problem was proposed by

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[321] "One of the greatest successes of medicine at that time" (Williams, *Angel of Death*, p. 146.). "None better known for efficacy than inoculation [variolation]" (Inoculation' (tr. Antoinette Emch-Deriaz) in *Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert*, 22 Apr. 2022.).

[322] A description of commercial vaccine production in 1906 pulls no punches: "Calves, often kept in squalid conditions, had their flanks shaved and inoculated with lymph from whichever source. After ten days, the blisters were cut open and the fluid allowed to run into a vessel pressed against the animal's skin." (Williams, *Angel of Death*, p. 270.)

[323] Ibid, p. 142.

another speaker, William Wilberforce (1759-1833).

For almost 20 years, Wilberforce had been campaigning to end Britain's dominant role in the slave trade between Africa and its colonies in the Americas. Because of his persistent efforts on behalf of enslaved Africans, Wilberforce gained the adulation of his fellow MPs. This was never clearer than on 23rd February 1807 when the Slave Trade Act was passed by a huge majority.

> The House rose almost to a man and turned towards Wilberforce in a burst of Parliamentary cheers. Suddenly, above the roar of 'hear, hear' and quite out of order, three hurrahs echoed and echoed while he sat, head bowed, tears streaming down his face.[324]

To this day Wilberforce's reputation is on a par with that of Edward Jenner as one of humanity's greatest benefactors.[325] *Amazing Grace*, a Hollywood film about Wilberforce, described him as "the man who changed history".[326] That description was a tribute to his anti-slavery campaigning. But in his speech during the vaccine debate Wilberforce changed history in another way too.

> The laws of quarantine have continued long enough to be enforced, and have been found to be attended with infinite advantage. These may be deemed a constraint upon the public, but having proved so beneficial, why not impose the same control over mankind in other cases where communications with the diseased may be attended with dangerous consequences?[327]

Although Wilberforce tried to row back on this part of his speech later, the cat was well and truly out of the bag. His phrase "control over mankind" became the guiding principle of those behind the vaccine initiative. The implications were huge, affecting the lives of people yet unborn.

It turned out that, not only was Wilberforce an early advocate of the vaccine, he was acquainted personally with its inventor, Edward Jenner. Following the triumph of his anti-slavery campaign, Wilberforce revealed to parliament that "Dr. Jenner generally attended his children".[328] In other words Jenner was the Wilberforce family doctor.[329] Moreover the two men had been discussing for several years how Wilberforce could support

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[324] John Pollock, *Wilberforce* (London, 1977), p. 211.

[325] In 2002 both Wilberforce and Jenner were voted into the Top 100 Great Britons in a poll conducted among viewers of BBC television.
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/tv_and_radio/ 2208671.stm], 14 May 2022.

[326] 'Amazing Grace movie trailer', *YouTube*, 20 Dec 2006.

[327] *Hansard*, HC Deb 2 Jul. 1806, vol. 7, col 887.

[328] *Hansard*, HC Deb 29 Jul. 1807, vol. 9, col 1014.

[329] They probably met in the city of Bath, about 30 miles south of Berkeley where Jenner lived. Wilberforce frequently stayed in Bath with his family for months at a time. Jenner also visited Bath periodically, both to treat patients and visit friends.

in parliament what he described as Jenner's "valuable discovery".[330]

The Jenner/Wilberforce alliance was one of the first examples of the collusion between medicine and politics that pushed vaccines relentlessly throughout the 19th century. As early as 1808 an unsuccessful attempt was made in the British parliament to outlaw variolation. In 1813 Jenner himself helped draft another bill with the same intention, but that was also defeated. For the next three decades the medical lobbyists continued to pressure MPs and the Lords, claiming that if the people switched from variolation to vaccination, "smallpox would entirely cease".[331] Eventually the lobbyists got their way.

In March 1840, the Marquess of Lansdowne brought to the attention of the House of Lords a petition supported by "1,200 medical practitioners".[332] According to the Marquess, the doctors wanted variolation banned as it had led to "thousands of deaths in the course of a few years". "It was necessary", he continued, "that ignorant people should be prevented, by legal enactments, from doing evil to others". Therefore, the noble spokesman asserted, only "members of the medical profession" should be permitted to administer the approved preventative measure against smallpox: Jenner's vaccine.

By July the legislation had been signed into law by Queen Victoria.[333] The new Vaccination Act wielded a stick and offered a carrot. The 'stick' was the threat of up to one month's imprisonment against any lay inoculator who provided variolation to the public. The poor, on the other hand, could receive a free vaccination service from "any legally qualified Medical Practitioner", who would receive "remuneration" for his trouble. That was the 'carrot'.

Speaking in parliament, the Attorney-General summed up the thinking behind the new statute:

> When it was seen that the House of Commons had almost unanimously agreed that inoculation ought to be abolished, he trusted that the measure would meet with the general concurrence of the public.[334]

Although the Act did not alter public behaviour overnight, an important precedent had been enshrined in law: when it came to public health, the common good trumped individual freedom. Back in 1721 Daniel Defoe, author of *Robinson Crusoe*, pointed out the limitations on enforcement of the then-revolutionary smallpox antidote: variolation.

> We have these things call'd priviledges [sic] and liberties, which will not

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330 Letter from Wilberforce to Jenner, 24 Feb. 1802, quoted in Baron, *Edward Jenner*, i. pp. 488-9.
331 *Hansard*, HC Deb 17 Jun 1840, vol. 54, col 1246.
332 *Hansard*, HL Deb 10 Mar 1840, vol. 52, col 1110-1.
333 *An Act to Extend the Practice of Vaccination*, Jul. 1840.
334 *Hansard*, HC Deb 17 Jun 1840, vol. 54, col 1260.

allow the Government to proceed with the people as they do in France.[335]

A century later those "liberties" were becoming a distant memory as what has been described as the "vaccination juggernaut" continued to erode personal choice.[336] It was not enough to encourage vaccination; it had to be made compulsory.

In March 1853 a recently-formed medical lobby group, the Epidemiological Society of London, rushed out a report written by its "Small-Pox and Vaccination Committee".[337] The society wanted to ensure that a proposed new vaccination bill before Parliament reflected its views before it was finalised. Here is a summary of the report's 'conclusions':

- Everyone is susceptible to smallpox. Only those who have already been through it or who have been vaccinated are safe.
- Smallpox kills 20-25% of those who contract it, and "in many instances" does permanent physical damage to those who survive.
- Most smallpox fatalities are among children, so "early vaccination… as soon after birth as possible" is vital.
- Doctors are agreed "that vaccination is a perfectly safe and efficient prophylactic against this disease".
- Through "ignorance" and "foolish prejudice", too many people are refusing vaccination for themselves and their children. So legal compulsion is needed "to ensure the efficient protection of the population of this country from the ravages of small-pox".
- "Underpaid public vaccinators" must be adequately compensated for their "additional and onerous duties", and "private practitioners" should be allowed to demand whatever fees they liked.
- The public accepts that no one should have the right to kill or harm another person. As the report put it, "we submit that it is but an extension of this principle to apply it to the questions of life and health".

The bill passed of course.[338] As the years went by it was followed by another, and another, and another. The cumulative effect was to instil in the public mind the belief that vaccination was here to stay. Wilberforce's slip about "control over mankind" was quickly forgotten as 'safe and effective' became the phrase most often associated with the vaccine.

As Jenner predicted, smallpox was eradicated. By then the vaccine had become ubiquitous. It has now been absorbed so unquestioningly into the very fabric of human life that, for many parents, vaccination is an essential rite of passage before their child can be admitted fully into society.

The bizarre has become commonplace.

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[335] Quoted in Mead, *Small pox and measles*, p. 293.
[336] Williams, *Angel of Death*, p. 235.
[337] *Report on the State of Small-Pox and Vaccination in England and Wales and other Countries, and on Compulsory Vaccination*, 3 May, 1853.
[338] *An Act further to extend and make compulsory the Practice of Vaccination*, 20 Aug 1853.

VIRUSES, VARIOLATION & VACCINES (PART 6): IN WHICH I 'FOLLOW THE SCIENCE'.

First published: 28 May 2022

Throughout recorded history our species has been troubled by diseases old and new, from leprosy and bubonic plague to cholera and tuberculosis. All of these afflictions threatened the lives and wellbeing of millions of people. But only one has led humanity to adopt the most extraordinary measures in a bid to evade its worst effects. That is smallpox.

In previous articles in this series I have described how variolation, and then vaccination, were not only encouraged but enforced on people, ostensibly to prevent the spread of that one disease, smallpox. Nevertheless, despite my research into this subject, I remain baffled by a number of unanswered and possibly unanswerable questions.

1. Why did people allow themselves to be infected with smallpox in order to avoid the worst effects of that same disease?
2. If people believed variolation or inoculation with smallpox actually worked, why did they not use the principle of self-infection to prevent other diseases?
3. Why did medics and politicians join forces to make Edward Jenner's vaccine alternative to variolation legally compulsory?
4. Why was Jenner so confident - even before he made his discovery public - that it would lead to "the total extinction of smallpox"?
5. When in May 1980 the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared that "smallpox eradication has been achieved throughout the world", why did its spokesman rule out a similar fate for other diseases?
6. Why did the practice of infecting people with disease become so acceptable during the 20th and 21st centuries - and not just smallpox?

Those who view the universe as the result of random accident or unfathomable coincidence might not be bothered by these conundrums. Perhaps they simply shrug off the contention with which I ended Part 5 of this series, that "the bizarre has become commonplace". Maybe they can, but I cannot.

In previous articles I have tried to understand humanity's propensity for the absurd, whether it be our faith in the valueless scraps of coloured paper in our purses or wallets,[339] or the extraordinary lengths we go to each Christmas to perpetuate as truth what we know to be fiction,[340] or our assumption that we can exploit endlessly the Earth and its resources without consequence.[341]

I would like to think that, in each case, my conclusions arose from the

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[339] Money (Part 1): "Money is our madness, our vast collective madness." (D.H. Lawrence) on page 214.

[340] Santa Claus is coming to town! on page 210.

[341] King of the world! How mankind leapt to the top of the evolutionary tree on page 146.

principles and techniques of historical enquiry I learnt in college, but that would be to gloss over an unavoidable reality. Until recently I accepted implicitly these things as part and parcel of normal life: money, Santa Claus, the supremacy of the human species – the works. Other examples?

As a frequent traveller up until 2019 I went along with the futile rituals at airport security, such as removing my shoes or placing my tiny tube of toothpaste in a plastic bag.

During the Celtic Tiger years I was going to invest my spare cash in bricks and mortar, because I foolishly imagined that property values would continue to rise as they had been doing for years. I was saved from disaster only because, during a brief moment of lucidity, I listened to the wise counsel of a good friend.

More to the point, as a parent I ensured that my children were vaccinated and protected against a plethora of diseases that I believed might otherwise damage their health or even end their lives.

I thought I was a critical thinker, easily able to distinguish between the real and the illusory. But my skills of discernment were only skin deep. As these examples demonstrate, I was as prone to deception as anyone else.

Everything changed when it dawned on me that, contrary to what we were being told, Covid-19 did *not* pose an "immediate, exceptional and manifest risk…to human life and public health". Whether that awareness stemmed from a hunch, an infusion of bolshiness, or an angel's whisper, who can say? But I became convinced that the people were being deceived by the promoters of the pandemic. That in turn led to my writing the first article for *History in the Making*.[342]

Around the same time another thought hit me. If a deception on this scale could be conceived and executed, not just in Ireland but across the world, surely anything was possible? That was my frame of mind as I began to re-examine aspects of life I had previously taken for granted. If Covid-19 is a hoax, what else is untrue – the smallpox/vaccine story perhaps?

In Parts 1-5 of this series I set out to explore the history of smallpox because I suspected that it and Covid were connected somehow. Not only were my suspicions confirmed, I found that the depth and complexity of the connection are breathtaking.

One way of looking at all that has happened since March 2020 is to see it as the execution of a plan that has been in the works for a very long time. Smallpox was an important element in that plan, perhaps the *most* important. But there is a problem in finishing the story I began in Part 1. Those behind the plan have covered their tracks very well. I can find no documentary or other verifiable sources to support my conclusions. Hence the six questions I listed above.

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[342] Divided Nation: Ireland in 2021 on page 125.

Then I had an idea. If there was nothing in my historian's bag of tools to complete the task, maybe I should 'follow the science', as practised by two of its most revered exponents?

Edward Jenner was able to test his theories about vaccines on human subjects, like the unfortunate James Phipps. However dubious his methods and findings were, they were accepted in the circles that mattered, and we have been living with the consequences ever since (as I outlined in Part 5).

Charles Darwin (1809-1882), on the other hand, would have needed to be a time traveller in order to verify his theory of evolution. So, although he was "fully convinced" that he was correct, he could never prove it to anyone else.[343] Hence his qualified conclusion at the end of *Origin of Species*:

> …*probably* all the organic beings which have ever lived on this earth have descended from some one primordial form, into which life was first breathed.[344]

Yet despite Darwin's theory remaining just that, it is, like vaccination, now accepted as unchallengeable truth by virtually everyone. As scientist Richard Dawkins observed:

> Today the theory of evolution is about as much open to doubt as the theory that the earth goes round the sun.[345]

Of course when I refer to 'follow the science' I am being sarcastic. Jenner (and perhaps Darwin too?) built his 'discovery', not on true scientific analysis, but on a combination of bluff, hubris, and establishment connections. So I don't expect my theory to be received with open arms like Jenner's (or Darwin's) - nor do I anticipate an endorsement from Richard Dawkins! All I can hope is that the reader will at least consider the possibility that what I write is true. But before I go any further, I need to raise two additional questions:

a. Who is behind the pandemic deception I described above?
b. What is their real objective?

In answer to the first question, the deceivers could be the politicians, the medics, or the businessmen who appear on our TV screens and in the newspapers, urging us all to abide by the rules or risk a terrible fate. (For instance, I can't help noticing the remarkable consensus on the vaccine question between figures as diverse as Pope Francis, environmental campaigner George Monbiot, and computer mogul Bill Gates.) Or they could be the *eminences grises*, like Klaus Schwab or the fictional Vito Corleone, who are said to pull the strings of those same politicians, etc.

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[343] Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by means of natural selection, preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life* (London 1859), p. 482.
[344] Ibid, p. 484. (emphasis added).
[345] Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford, 1978), p. 1.

from behind the scenes. Whoever they are, I believe they ultimately serve "the ruler of this world", that apparently all-powerful figure who is really no more than a toothless tiger.

That brings us to question b: whoever 'they' are, why are they doing it?

Is it because they are billionaires who want to become trillionaires by pulling off an unprecedented money-grab? Or are they civic-minded maniacs trying to save the planet from the rest of us? Maybe they are atheists who hate religion so much that they want to destroy it in all its forms.

Personally, I think the Covid project is big enough to embrace all of these agendas, and others too. Perhaps these are the subsidiary goals of a vaster, more ambitious aspiration, which I am convinced is nothing less than the permanent enslavement of all humanity. That is *my* theory.

If this is indeed the overarching objective, I am not concerned now with the motives behind it. The whys and wherefores are for another day. My focus here is on the goal and the plan behind it, how it was formulated and turned into an executable project. Perhaps it begins with a simple question: how does one achieve complete control over *Homo sapiens*?

Hypnotism or some form of brain-washing might be useful but, even when the subject cooperates, the effects are only temporary. That is true today whether someone is mesmerised by their TV, or by a stage magician like Derren Brown. The television viewer can go outside for exercise or to talk to friends. The audience member will leave the theatre after the show. In both cases the 'spell' is broken.

Physically imprisoning someone behind high walls and a locked door is another option. But is it possible to keep *everyone* behind bars forever? Even those who enter their prison willingly might kick up later and try to break out.

Those behind Covid-19 must have realised how impracticable it would be to force people into relinquishing their freedom. They could surely see that such a crude approach would likely breed resistance or resentment and make it almost impossible to achieve the level of docile submission required for the ordered society they envisage.

Let us assume they did not want people to give up their liberty grudgingly, like a defeated army. Instead their surrender should be willing, eager even, as if the people thought they were entering into a beneficial relationship with a benign saviour - rather than submitting to a tyrannical despot.

If that was what marketing people call the 'brief', proposing smallpox as the solution must have seemed very strange. But it was brilliant, and it might have worked.

VIRUSES, VARIOLATION & VACCINES (PART 7): "WE RAN OUT OF TIME."

First published: 04 June 2022

In order to convey to the reader what I believe to be the truth behind the smallpox story, I am taking a different approach than usual in this final instalment of Viruses, Variolation & Vaccines. If you imagine that the plan I discussed in Part 6 was conceived by an individual, an architect if you will, then this dialogue should make sense. I hope so.

* * *

JP Thanks for agreeing to talk to me about your plan.

A I did not have much choice. But here I am. So ask your questions.

JP Sure. Will you tell me something about the task you took on?

A My brief was to come up with a mechanism that would enable the client to control everyone, not just a few, and not just for a while, but everyone, forever.

JP What is this mechanism exactly?

A It requires an unlikely marriage between two quite different components. Although it has been in the pipeline for a very long time, only now is it being discussed openly.

JP Yes, recently I came across a reference to it:

> Biometric sensors and direct brain-computer interfaces aim to erode the border between electronic machines and organic bodies, and to literally get under our skin. Once the tech-giants come to terms with the human body, they might end up manipulating our entire bodies in the same way they currently manipulate our eyes, fingers and credit cards.[346]

A It is framed here as a warning about something that might or might not happen one day. But that is misleading. Harari is not speculating about the future. Things are much further advanced than he says.

JP But what has this to do with smallpox, never mind vaccines or variolation?

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[346] Yuval Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* (London 2019), p. 109.

A To use Harari's words, I proposed a way to "erode the border between electronic machines and organic bodies". We may not always have had "biometric sensors", but we came "to terms with the human body" a long time ago. Assuming that the technology would be ready when it was needed, I believed my plan to "get under" the skin and into the human bloodstream would work. And the client agreed.

JP Hence smallpox?

A Smallpox was a means to an end. Variolation was the real breakthrough.

JP Yes, I've described it in a previous instalment.

A Variolation showed that, if the motivation was strong enough, ordinary people were prepared to allow virtually anything into their bodies.

JP And that motivation was fear?

A Essentially yes. As you described, smallpox was a dreaded disease. Yet even I was surprised at how far people would go in order to prevent it. But you have not described the full variolation procedure, have you?

JP No, I concentrated on the basic steps of inoculation itself, which I think are dreadful enough without going into the rest. Nevertheless we have a pretty vivid description of the whole business which, in the case of 8-year-old Edward Jenner, lasted 6 weeks.

A As Edward Jenner is a crucial figure in this story, perhaps you would elaborate?

JP This account of what the boy went through has been passed down to us by Reverend Thomas D. Fosbroke, a friend of Jenner's:

> He was bled, to ascertain whether his blood was fine; was purged repeatedly, till he became emaciated and feeble; was kept on very low diet, small in quantity, and dosed with a diet-drink to sweeten the blood. After this barbarism of human-veterinary practice he was removed to one of the then usual inoculation stables, and haltered up with others in a terrible state

of disease, although none died.[347]

A Terrible as that was, it worked. Jenner never contracted smallpox.

JP I can see why you were surprised at people's willingness to go through this ordeal themselves, or to inflict it on a helpless child. Yet by the end of the 18th century variolation had become widely accepted as the best safeguard against smallpox, hadn't it?

A Yes, it is impossible to overstate the importance of this achievement. If people were not only willing, but eager, to have a potentially deadly poison inserted under their skin, then we were more than halfway to our goal.

JP But why smallpox? You could have targeted leprosy, typhus, bubonic plague, or any of the other deadly diseases that have wiped out millions of people, couldn't you?

A No. Smallpox was the only one that had all the characteristics we needed. The important point is that variolation had been accepted. It was time for the next phase.

JP The vaccine?

A Yes. But the vaccine was not just an improved version of variolation. It had to be regarded by everyone as the default means of preventing the horrors of smallpox. But there were plenty of other horrors for people to contend with - not just disease. For those without much money, life was short and pretty grim while it lasted. So we had to overcome lots of distractions and obstacles.

JP How did you do that?

A We made sure that everyone, especially the poor, was coerced or browbeaten into having their children vaccinated. This was vital because, after a generation or two, the vaccine would come to be seen as a normal step, like registering a new birth, which people took without giving it much thought. And so it transpired. But a few resisted and we needed to ensure that, when

[347] Fosbroke, 'Edward Jenner', in *Berkeley Manuscripts*, pp. 221-2.

the time came, *everyone* would agree to have the mechanism of control inserted under their skin. That was the primary goal after all.

JP So what did you do?

A Smallpox was still our focus. Don't forget that the vaccine was being pitched as the preventative antidote for this one disease. All we had to do was prove the vaccine's effectiveness beyond any doubt. As you know, Jenner predicted that his vaccine would rid the world of smallpox. Two centuries later, in 1980, that very outcome was announced to the world.[348] Since then the story of smallpox eradication has been told again and again in order to imprint on everyone's mind the efficacy of vaccination as the best means of protecting public health. Only recently the WHO declared that "Vaccines are among the most powerful inventions in human history", and described their role in exterminating smallpox as a "scientific triumph".[349]

JP You're right. When you put it like that, smallpox was tailor-made for your plan. If you had actually created it for your own purposes it could not have been better suited.

A Indeed.

JP So when the vaccine arrived, you combined legal enforcement, social pressure, and a smidgen of 'science', to bring everyone on board. Once vaccines were developed for other diseases, it remained only for a worldwide pandemic to hit us and your "mechanism of control" would have become a reality. But something went wrong, didn't it?

A Yes. We ran out of time.

JP How? Why?

A A number of reasons, but I can explain it best through an analogy. You're familiar with the story of Princess Rose-Bud, better

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348 Thirty-third World Health Assembly (minutes), WHA33.4, GLOBAL SMALLPOX ERADICATION, 14 May, 1980.

349 'WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19', 23 Feb. 2022, *World Health Organization* [https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19-23-february-2022], 31 May 2022.

known as the Sleeping Beauty?

JP I'm sure most people are.

A Fine. I'll keep it brief. While the princess was still a baby, a disgruntled fairy prophesied that a fatal accident would kill her when she reached 15 years of age. Another fairy modified the curse so that the child would not die, but instead fall into a deep sleep for 100 years. On her 15th birthday the prophecy was fulfilled. Not only did the princess go asleep, so too did her parents, the king and queen, and everyone else in the royal household. Even the animals and insects fell into the same trance that overtook every living thing within the palace walls. The years went by and, a century later, a passing prince found the enchanted castle and went inside. He woke the sleeping princess and it was as if the spell had been broken. Slowly but surely everyone came back to their senses and life returned to the palace.

JP So are you saying that you had a predetermined length of time in which to implement your plan - and you missed the deadline?

A Something like that.

JP If the timeframe did not change, did something delay you?

A I have told you as much as you need to know. You can make whatever assumptions you like about these matters.

JP But what about right now? We seem to be in a 'limbo' period when things could go either way. Is it only a temporary respite before the enslavement project gets back on track, or has it been defeated once and for all?

A Look, I have answered all your questions about my plan. I really have to go now.

JP Hold on. You have already admitted that you ran out of time. All I'm asking now is that you shed a little light on what this means for us all.

A OK, here is a more modern story than Sleeping Beauty. A bit closer to the actuality too.

JP I'm listening.

A Imagine a hospital in which a lengthy and complex operation is being carried out. In the theatre are the lead surgeon and his assistants, several nurses, the anaesthetist, and of course the unconscious patient. There is a viewing room above the operating theatre in which various senior medics and hospital management are observing the proceedings below. Then disaster strikes. A nurse has spotted a tremor on the patient's face and a movement in his hand. She realises that he is beginning to wake up while the operation is still underway! She immediately tells her colleagues.

JP So what does everyone do?

A There are different reactions. The surgeons speed up in the hope that they can finish the procedure before the patient is fully conscious. Upstairs an executive is on the phone to the hospital's lawyers looking for their advice in case the patient decides to sue. A senior consultant is rushing down to the theatre to help ease the mounting panic. The patient's wife has heard the commotion and is pounding on the door of the operating theatre. Meanwhile the anaesthetist realises that he cannot put the patient back to sleep because the drugs he needs have all been used. What a pickle! Should he tell the others that the patient will be fully conscious soon? Or can he quietly slip out of the theatre while no one is looking?

JP Who are you in this story? The surgeon? The anaesthetist?

A Oh, is that the time? I must be gone.

THE FIRST MARY (PART 1): BAD BLOOD BETWEEN JESUS AND HIS MOTHER

First published: 09 July 2022

When I read the Gospels as historical sources, however imperfect they are, they reveal much about Jesus the man and the time and places in which he lived. Recently I was researching Jesus' attitude to money and wealth, and you can see the results in an earlier article.[350] As I went through my old Bible I could not help noticing other things - odd things, unexpected things.

One theme in particular stands out. In several passages there are clear signs of tension in the relationship between Jesus and his mother. Sometimes it seems that Jesus resented Mary. Why this should be so is not immediately obvious, but the evidence is unavoidable.

A passage in Luke's Gospel contains the earliest example I can find.[351] Jesus was 12 and had become separated from Mary and Joseph while they were visiting Jerusalem. After a search lasting several days they found their son in the temple, where he was deep in discussion with several learned clerics. Jesus was apparently oblivious to the worry he had caused his parents. When Mary remonstrated with the boy, he responded as if she, rather than he, had done something wrong.

> "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my father's house?"

Jesus' brusqueness towards Mary continued into adulthood. On the only other occasion when the Gospels depict mother and son speaking to each other, Jesus was equally sharp. This was at the strange event known as the Wedding Feast at Cana.

The story appears in the Gospel of John only.[352] It concerns a wedding to which Jesus, his mother, and his disciples were invited. At a certain point in the celebrations, Mary noticed that the wine had run out and mentioned this to her son. But Jesus reacted as if this was not just a casual observation. How else can his rather tart response be explained?

> "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come."

After pointing out the wine deficit to Jesus, Mary turned to the waiters and instructed them to "Do whatever he tells you." It seems clear that she was not expecting her son to do anything mundane like getting the staff to order a new batch of wine. They were guests at a wedding and presumably the drink supply was a matter for the host or the venue. No, Jesus took it that his mother wanted him to intervene in a different way, a special way, and so he did. Jesus performed what must have seemed to everyone like a magic trick. He resolved the drinks shortage by transforming the water in six large jars into wine, good wine at that. This, we

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[350] Money (Part 3): A warning from the past on page 221.

[351] Luke 2:41-49.

[352] John 2:1-11.

are told, was "the first of his signs", i.e. Jesus' first miracle.

Given that most of Jesus' miracles involved healing the sick or raising the dead, this one seems atypical. Even when he performed a similar feat, like walking on the water or calming the storm, there was a lesson bound up in the wonders he created. In performing those miracles, it seems to me, Jesus was demonstrating to his disciples that they could do the same – if they could overcome their fears.

When Jesus taught his followers how to pray, he included in his formula the line "Give us this day our daily bread".[353] Jesus believed that no one should fret about where the next meal was coming from. He brought this principle to life when he fed the multitudes in the desert. All four Gospels relate how Jesus multiplied the small supply of food available to provide more than enough to satisfy the hungry thousands who had followed him into the wilderness.[354]

This is the miracle that is most similar to Cana. In both cases Jesus conjured up food or drink out of unpromising materials in order to satisfy everyone's needs. Yet, what a gulf of meaning separates the two. In the desert Jesus wanted us to see for ourselves why we should not worry about filling our bellies. He believed that God provides for all our needs, if we just have faith.

But what was he telling us at Cana? I can see no obvious lesson or teaching incorporated into his performance. It is difficult to see it as anything other than a cheap parlour trick, instigated by his mother and against Jesus' better judgement.

The temple and Cana incidents could perhaps be seen as isolated displays of petulance towards his mother by an otherwise dutiful son. However another incident following the Cana wedding suggests that they were part of a pattern in Jesus' poor relationship with Mary. The incident is related in three of the four Gospels.[355]

Matthew, Mark, and Luke described how, shortly after embarking on his public life, Jesus was out and about preaching and healing, gathering large crowds around him. As he spoke to the people someone told him that "his mother and his brethren" had arrived and wanted to see him. However, instead of going to greet them, Jesus effectively ignored them, asking rhetorically, "Who are my mother and my brethren?" He then said a strange thing:

"Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother."[356]

Although this quotation is taken from Mark's Gospel, Jesus' words as re-

[353] Matthew 6:11.
[354] e.g. John 6:5-13.
[355] Matthew 12:46-50, Mark 3:31-35, Luke 8:19-21.
[356] Mark 3:35.

corded by the other two evangelists are essentially the same.[357] However, neither Matthew nor Luke offers any plausible reason why Jesus should have snubbed his family in this way. It is only in Mark's Gospel that we find a possible motivation for Jesus' apparently harsh remarks.[358] Mark's account is not terribly clear but it offers enough detail to enable us to piece together what seems to have transpired on that day.

According to Mark, Jesus felt so besieged by the multitudes that "he went home", presumably to the nearby village of Capernaum where we are told he lived.[359] There he continued to address those who had followed him inside his dwelling. While most of those present were presumably eager to hear Jesus' words, a few were less sympathetic towards their host. They included what Mark described as "the scribes who came down from Jerusalem". These "scribes" accused Jesus of being "possessed by Be-el-zebul… the prince of demons". In effect they were claiming that Jesus was not doing God's work, but the Devil's.

Also at this gathering, according to Mark, were members of Jesus' "family". They had come to restrain Jesus whom they declared to be "beside himself", i.e. deranged or crazy.[360]

Jesus is reported to have confronted both groups, starting with the "scribes". They had probably seen Jesus expelling "unclean spirits" from among those who had been entreating him for help. So he responded to their charge that he was "possessed by Be-el-zebul" with a question: "How can Satan cast out Satan?" Jesus pointed out that, if the Devil was empowering him to cast out demons, it could mean only that evil was divided against itself. In that case Satan's kingdom would be coming to an end.

Jesus then went on to identify what he believed to be the only way he could be overcome by the forces of darkness:

> "But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man; then indeed he may plunder his house."[361]

We must bear in mind that, according to Mark, Jesus said this inside his own home to a crowd that included family members who had come "to seize him". In that context did Jesus regard these relatives as robbers trying to "bind" him before "plunder[ing] his house"? Is that why he

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[357] "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Matthew 12:50). "My mother and my brethren are those who hear the word of God and do it." (Luke 8:21)

[358] Mark 3:19-27.

[359] Matthew 4:13.

[360] While some versions of the Bible (including the Roman Catholic edition of the Revised Standard Version cited throughout this book) use the term 'friends' in this passage, most prefer 'family' or 'kinsfolk'. The literal translation of the original Greek text is "those of him" with the "those" implied. There is no noun as such.

[361] Mark 3:27.

commented as he did when he heard that his mother and siblings wished to see him? Was he implying that his family, and his own mother Mary in particular, were not following "the will of God"?[362]

In her analysis of Mary's role, during and after her earthly life, Marina Warner had this to say about the incident I have been describing:

> The sequence of events implies strongly that Jesus' "friends" [or "family"] have marshalled his mother and relatives to help their efforts to stop his ministry.[363]

Yet is it likely that the authoritative figure in the Cana story would ever allow herself to be "marshalled" by anyone? At the same time, there is not even a hint that Mary turned up at Jesus' home to *defend* her eldest son against attack, whether by those "scribes" or by her own relatives. So, although Mark's account of the incident is confusing to say the least, the most likely interpretation is that Mary was leading her other children in a bid to stop her eldest son's earthly mission in its tracks - in effect to "bind" him.

Based on his reaction to his family's arrival at this crucial moment, that seems to have been exactly what Jesus himself was thinking.

The Gospel of John offers us a final insight into the relationship between Jesus and Mary. However this one is different from all the other accounts I have described. It is the moment when the dying Jesus spoke to Mary at the foot of the cross.[364] Did this episode mark the end of the bad blood between them?

THE FIRST MARY (PART 2): RECONCILIATION AT CALVARY?

First published: 23 July 2022

Mary the mother of Jesus is a peripheral figure in the Gospels. As Marina Warner wrote:

> Her birth, her death, her appearance are never mentioned. During Christ's ministry she plays a small part, and when she does appear the circumstances are perplexing and often slighting.[365]

As I outlined in Part 1, the "slighting" Warner referred to usually came from Jesus himself. I detailed several instances where Jesus' words to, or about, his mother reflected a certain irritation or even hostility towards the woman who bore him in her womb for nine months. The Wedding Feast at Cana is a good example. In her discussion of that episode, Warner

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362 Jesus said something similar to an unknown woman when she shouted out to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked". Instead of thanking the stranger for praising his mother, he replied, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it." (Luke 11:27-28).

363 Marina Warner, *Alone of all her sex: The myth and the cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York, 1976), pp. 14-5. (See also footnote 354.)

364 John 19:25-27.

365 Warner, *Alone of all her sex*p. 14.

described Mary as "apparently rebuffed quite brutally by her son".[366]

Last time I suggested that there might have been a softening in Jesus' attitude towards Mary at the end of his life. This is how the Gospel of John related the final encounter between mother and son:

> But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Mag'dalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.[367]

Could it be that, for Mary, the great sadness of witnessing Jesus' last moments was tempered to some extent by her son's expression of love and concern for her future wellbeing? If so, this was more than just a touching personal moment between a son and his mother. Many biblical scholars attach a wider, more universal, significance to Jesus' words.

> To some, this moment is the birth of the Christian Church, with Mary as the mother of the Church and the Beloved Disciple representing all those whom the Lord loves.[368]

So a lot of theological weight is attached to this simple exchange. But did that encounter between mother and son happen at all? In order to answer this question we have to consider several problems with the account cited above.

1. John's Gospel contains the only record of Jesus' last words to his mother and to "the disciple whom he loved", i.e. John himself.[369] The incident is not mentioned at all by the authors of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
2. Apart from John in the passage cited above, none of the Gospel authors placed *any* of Jesus' male friends or disciples at the crucifixion site. According to one of the Gospels, after Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane "all the disciples forsook him and fled".[370] This explains why, if the accounts in Matthew, Mark, and Luke are correct, only women turned up to keep vigil as Jesus hung on the cross.[371]
3. Although several Gospel writers (including John) named these women individually, e.g. Mary Magdalene, none (except John) stated that Jesus' mother Mary was among them.

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366 Ibid, p. 16.

367 John 19:25-27.

368 John Bowker, *The Complete Bible Handbook* (London, 2004), p. 317.

369 John 21:24. The author of John's Gospel claimed that he was both the "the disciple whom Jesus loved" and a first-hand witness to everything he described. Scholars believe him to have been a son of Zebedee and brother of another apostle named James (John Bowker, *The Complete Bible Handbook* (London, 2004), p. 313).

370 Matthew 26:56. Mark 14:50.

371 Luke 23:49. This passage also includes a reference to "all his acquaintances" having been at Calvary. However, the author could not have intended this to include Jesus' closest male followers who were presumably among those who had "fled".

4. The other three Gospels referred to the followers, friends, and family of Jesus who were present at his crucifixion as "looking on from afar" or standing "at a distance", not "standing near" as John's Gospel put it.[372]

Other aspects of John's story raise further questions.

Crucifixion has been characterised as the "most hideous kind of execution" in the ancient world.[373] Like 'breaking on the wheel', which I discussed in another article, it was designed to kill its victims slowly.[374] According to one description, death came after many hours through a combination of terrible effects, including:

> an increasing asphyxia, the tetanic state of the muscles, hunger and above all thirst, to say nothing of the wounds made by the loathsome birds that always haunted the place.[375]

Up to relatively recently many executions were held in a public space. Jesus' crucifixion was no exception, with probably hundreds of onlookers present. We are told that some of these were shouting insults at the crucified Jesus.[376] There were also lots of Roman soldiers milling about - a full battalion according to one account[377] - some arguing over who would get to keep Christ's discarded clothes.[378] What with the hawkers and traders who must have followed the procession from the city nearby, Calvary was probably a pretty noisy place that day.

We are told in several of the Gospel accounts that Jesus cried out in agony as he struggled on the gibbet.[379] Of course Jesus was a man who felt pain like anyone else. Given the awful effects of crucifixion it is not difficult to believe that he screamed several times during that dreadful afternoon. It is quite likely also that his cries were loud enough to be heard above the din of the crowd, to be reported later by the Gospel writers.

In these circumstances is it credible, as we are told in John's Gospel, that Jesus was also able to speak coherently to two people who were close enough to hear his words - even if we accept that they were actually there in the first place?

However nothing should be ruled out. Perhaps Mary, Jesus' mother, *did* appear at her son's execution without being noticed by the other witnesses. It is possible also that one of Jesus' male followers risked capture by accompanying her to the scene. Maybe both managed to get close enough to the cross for Jesus to spot them and say what he is reported to

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372 e.g. Matthew 27:55-56.
373 Henri Daniel-Rops, *Daily life in Palestine at the time of Christ* (London 2002), pp. 177-8.
374 Death as a public spectacle: Was the past really "a different country"? on page 182.
375 Daniel-Rops, *Daily life in Palestine*, p. 178.
376 Matthew 27:39-44.
377 Mark 15:16-20.
378 John 19:23-25.
379 e.g. "And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last." (Mark 15:37).

have said. Even then one more objection must be overcome in order to accept the authenticity of John's account.

Why would Jesus entrust his mother's welfare to one of his disciples when, as I outlined in Part 1, he knew that she had other children who could look after her?[380]

Of course this raises the question as to why John, or a later editor of his Gospel, would make up something that never happened. However, such speculation is beyond the scope of this investigation, which is to establish if there was, or could have been, any reconciliation between Mary and her son as Jesus was dying on the cross. Based on the evidence presented here, the answer must be 'no'.

So far we have been examining the sparse biographical details of a woman who lived and died in a tiny country many centuries ago. But her posthumous influence on the development of western, and indeed global, civilisation is incalculable. As Warner has written,

> [Mary] is one of the few female figures to have attained the status of myth – a myth that for nearly two thousand years has coursed through our culture.[381]

If my interpretation of the Gospel record is correct, Mary opposed her son's mission to draw the world away from its attachment to "the ruler of this world". Not only that, but from an early age Jesus realised this and resisted his mother's efforts to frustrate him. So the implications of the theory I am putting forward here are enormous. However, before I can examine what these implications might be for us all, I need to address one more question.

How did Jesus' treatment of Mary compare with his attitude and behaviour towards women generally?

THE FIRST MARY (PART 3): JESUS "AMONGST WOMEN"

First published: 07 August 2022

Details of who actually wrote the Gospels and when they were written may be in dispute, but we can be confident of one thing: the authors were all male. They lived in a society where men were regarded as the 'standard model' of *Homo sapiens*. Women were essentially invisible. As followers of Jesus the Gospel writers may have been more enlightened than most of their peers, but even they would have found it difficult to resist the cultural conditioning of the time.

This phenomenon is evident in the Gospel accounts of one of Jesus' miracles, when he transformed a few scraps of food into a feast for the

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[380] Joseph, Mary's husband, was another obvious candidate to take care of Mary after Jesus' death. However, by this time he might have been dead himself leaving Mary a widow.

[381] Warner, *Alone of all her sex,* p. xxv.

multitudes who had followed him into the wilderness.[382] According to Mark, Luke, and John, there were 5,000 men to be fed. They did not mention women, however, even though it is unlikely to have been an exclusively male gathering. Only in Matthew's Gospel do we read that "those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children".[383] So there could have been at least 10,000 famished souls there that day but, to the authors of the Gospels, only the men really counted.

Notwithstanding this blind spot, the Gospels contain enough references to individual females to suggest that some women did attract the attention of the authors. Zebedee's wife, the mother of James and John, is one example. She pulled Jesus aside one day to ask him for a favour. She wanted him to keep a special place "in your kingdom" for her two boys. While her cheeky request annoyed the other apostles, it did not knock a feather out of Jesus. Besides, Zebedee's wife was one of his closest female allies, those women who stuck by him to the end.[384]

Jesus encountered lots of women during his wanderings through Israel, whether it was the young daughter of Jairus whom he brought back to life, or Peter's mother-in-law whose fever he cured when he saw her lying sick in bed.[385] He was kind and attentive to them all.

Sometimes Jesus' dealings with women were so unconventional that even his closest male companions were dismayed. The story of his conversation with the woman at the well illustrates that, for Jesus, rules were made to be broken.[386] Although we are told that the disciples "marvelled that he was talking with a woman", it was not just her sex that was problematic.

Firstly she was a Samaritan and therefore part of an ethnic group that was shunned by the orthodox Jews around Jerusalem. If another Gospel author is correct, Jesus must have abided by this policy because he warned his disciples to steer clear of Samaria when he sent them out to preach.[387] Secondly the woman at the well was sexually promiscuous, although this only emerged during the recorded conversation with Jesus. According to the Gospel account she had five ex-husbands and was now living with a man to whom she was not married. This was probably another black mark against her, given that Jesus is reported elsewhere as having expressed strong disapproval of any man who even *thought* about having sex outside marriage.[388]

These two factors – the woman's cultural origins and her colourful sex

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382 Matthew 14:13-21. Mark 6:32-44. Luke 9:10-17. John 6:1-13.
383 Matthew 14:21.
384 Matthew 20:20-28 and 27:55-56.
385 Luke 8:40-56. Matthew 8:14-15.
386 John 4:1-30.
387 Matthew 10:5.
388 Mathew 5:28.

life – should have been enough to warrant Jesus' censure when he discovered them; except he knew it all from the start.

Jesus met the woman in a Samaritan town and must have realised immediately that she was a local. When they started chatting, it was Jesus who informed the woman that he was aware of her sexual history. Whether this is an example of Jesus' preternatural gifts or his deductive reasoning is unknown. What is abundantly clear from the Gospel account is that Jesus never once rebuked or slighted the woman. On the contrary he was tolerance itself in his exchanges with someone whom his critics back home would have branded a pariah and a harlot. The Samaritan woman herself was so impressed by Jesus that she became a *de facto* apostle, telling people in her city about the coming of Christ.

Jesus displayed a natural tenderness and empathy towards women that was unusual for men at the time. As another Bible expert observed:

> Jesus set a standard for the place of women in the community that the early church, functioning in Greco-Roman and Jewish surroundings, found hard to maintain.[389]

Yet Jesus selected twelve men to be his disciples or apostles. All the Gospel writers agreed on this – Matthew, Mark and Luke even named the twelve, and there was not one woman among them.[390] What is perhaps less clear to the casual reader of the New Testament is that Jesus valued his female followers as highly as those twelve men.

Jesus was surrounded by a group of strong and loyal women who were independent and affluent enough to support him and the apostles financially. We are told that - among "many others" - they included Mary Magdalene and a woman named Joanna who was the wife of a senior official at King Herod's court.[391] In light of the focus on men that we see in the example of the feeding of the multitude, the fact that the Gospels mentioned these women at all is remarkable. As one researcher asked:

> In what other scenes in the Gospels might there have been women present even though they are not mentioned…at the Last Supper or at the Transfiguration…?[392]

Whatever about these events, another that was almost as significant did include Jesus' female followers, even though none of the four Gospel authors mentioned their presence. Through a close reading of the Gospel of Luke, the researcher cited above concluded that Mary Magdalene and some other women must have been there when Jesus predicted his own

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389 R. Alan Culpepper, 'Contours of the historical Jesus' in Jan van der Watt (ed.), *The quest for the real Jesus* (Leiden 2013), p. 78.
390 Matthew 10:1-4. Mark 3:13-19. Luke 6:13-16. John 6:67-70.
391 Luke 8:2-3.
392 Damian Bruce, "Mary Magdalene: The forgotten apostle" (Senior Sophister Dissertation, Trinity College, Dublin, 2005), p. 16.

arrest and crucifixion.[393] Jesus made the prophecy during an intimate moment that he shared only with his closest companions. Elements of it are also mentioned in Matthew and Mark.[394]

Mary Magdalene and her friends may not have been officially-designated apostles like Peter and John, but Jesus accorded them all the same level of trust and friendship. As I wrote earlier in this series, those female companions repaid Jesus' trust when they turned up at his crucifixion.[395]

The Gospels tell us also that Mary Magdalene, either alone or with one or two of the other women, was the first of Jesus' followers to meet and speak with him after his resurrection.[396] Although the Gospel writers differed on the detail of what happened next, all four agreed that Mary Magdalene then went to the male apostles and told them that Jesus had risen from the dead. As the first witness to the resurrection Mary Magdalene has been honoured since the Middle Ages with the title 'Apostle to the Apostles'.

We should be grateful to have these insights into Jesus' relationships with the females around him. He made no distinction between the men and women who offered him their love and support. Whatever the reason may have been for Jesus choosing only men to be his designated apostles, it was hardly because he regarded males as inherently superior to females. It could be that the opposite is true, given that the resurrected Christ showed himself to a woman before he appeared to any man.

In that context it is plain that what Warner characterised as the "troublesome" nature of Jesus' behaviour towards Mary his mother had nothing to do with her female sex.[397] He saw her, not as an ally like Peter or Mary Magdalene, but as an opponent who would scupper his mission if she could. Yet she was still his mother and he would never have dishonoured her. This, I believe, explains his Cana 'miracle'. Mary wanted it, so like a respectful son Jesus did what his mother wanted.

THE FIRST MARY (PART 4): "ALL GENERATIONS WILL CALL ME BLESSED"

First published: 20 August 2022

After her death Mary became a revered icon honoured across the Christian world as the Mother of God. We children were raised to regard her as our mother too.[398] One of the first prayers we learnt when I was a boy was the 'Hail Mary'. It was like a companion to the 'Lord's Prayer', otherwise known as the 'Our Father', which we were also taught at an early age.

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393 Ibid, pp. 15-6.
394 Luke 9:18-22, Matthew 16:13-20, Mark 8:27-30
395 The First Mary (Part 2): Reconciliation at Calvary? on page 263.
396 Matthew 28:1-10. Mark 16:9-11. John 20:11-18.
397 Warner, *Alone of all her sex,* p. 15.
398 Crosbhealach ("Cross-road") 1/2 on page 81.

The 'Hail Mary' was everywhere. During the typical five sets (or decades) of the Rosary, which some families said every day, the 'Hail Mary' was recited no fewer than 50 times. Those who managed to avoid the Rosary could not easily avoid the 'Hail Mary'. Twice a day, at twelve noon and again at six o'clock in the evening, the ringing of church bells announced that it was time to stop whatever we were doing and say the 'Angelus'. This mini-ritual incorporated various salutations and tributes to the mother of Jesus. It also included three repetitions of the 'Hail Mary'. So, even without the Rosary, that meant six 'Hail Marys' every day if we responded to both sets of 'Angelus' bells.

It is likely, therefore, that in those days (and perhaps now also) recitations of the 'Hail Mary' far outnumbered those of the 'Our Father'.

It is interesting to compare these prayers. The 'Our Father' is the older of the two. The Gospels tell us that Jesus Christ himself composed it, which would make it nearly 2,000 years old.[399] The 'Hail Mary' is thought to have evolved into its settled form during the Middle Ages. It comprises both biblical verses and original lines.[400] If we look more closely at the texts we can see other differences.

OUR FATHER

Our Father,
Who art in Heaven,
hallowed be Thy name;
Thy Kingdom come,
Thy will be done
on earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
Amen.

HAIL MARY

Hail Mary, full of grace,
the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou amongst women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death.
Amen.

The titles alone illustrate the most obvious distinction between the 'Our Father' and the 'Hail Mary'. In the first it is clearly God who is being invoked. The addressee of the second, on the other hand, is not God but Jesus' mother Mary. This raises a fundamental question. Jesus did not

[399] Matthew 6:9-13.
[400] Luke 1:28 and 1:42.

teach his followers to pray to himself, so why does the Church promote a prayer directed towards his mother?

Continuing the comparison reveals other anomalies. Before he recited the 'Our Father', we are told that Jesus advised his listeners to avoid "empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words".[401] So in keeping with his warning, Jesus did not lavish praise on God.[402] In contrast, the 'Hail Mary' incorporates two extravagant tributes to Mary - she is "full of grace" and "Blessed…amongst women". Although these are quotes from the Gospel accounts of Mary's pregnancy, would Jesus have regarded them as "empty phrases"?

Finally there are differences in the way the 'Our Father' and the 'Hail Mary' frame the petitions or appeals for divine favour that make up the second part of each prayer. In the 'Our Father' the supplicant asks God for specific material and spiritual gifts, i.e. food, forgiveness, and protection from evil. Jesus saw no point in adding anything else because, as the Gospels tell us, "your Father knows what you need before you ask him".[403] Those who recite the 'Hail Mary' are seeking one extraordinary benefit from Mary, i.e. that she intercede with God on behalf of "us sinners".

In light of Jesus' carefully-worded prayer, this appeal at the end of the 'Hail Mary' seems redundant. Why should we need a third party to pray to God on our behalf if we have the means in the 'Our Father' to do it ourselves? Nevertheless, through the constant repetition I mentioned above, the 'Hail Mary' planted the idea in our minds that Mary is a well-placed intermediary between God and imperfect humans. This idea is made more explicit in another medieval prayer.

In the 'Salve Regina' or 'Hail Holy Queen' Mary is addressed as our "most gracious advocate". The term 'advocate', with its legal connotations, suggests that Mary is a kind of 'celestial barrister' who can persuade the judge to go easy on us when we appear in his court.

Such an analogy is not as flippant as it seems. In an encyclical issued in 1891, Pope Leo XIII asserted that we "need an intercessor mighty in favour with God". Leo was in no doubt as to the identity of that intercessor.

> Mary is the intermediary through whom is distributed unto us this immense treasure of mercies gathered by God, for mercy and truth were created by Jesus Christ. Thus as no man goeth to the Father but by the Son, so no man goeth to Christ but by His Mother.[404]

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401 Matthew 6:7.

402 It is unlikely that Jesus was contradicting his own advice in his use of the line "hallowed be Thy name". It was probably Jesus' way of acknowledging Jewish sensitivity about the holy name of God, i.e. Yahweh. (see Daniel-Rops, *Daily life in Palestine*, pp. 409-10).

403 Matthew 6:8.

404 Leo XIII, 'Octobri mense', 22 Sep 1891, *Holy See* [https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_22091891_octobri-mense.html], 15 Aug. 2022.

Note the language used. Mary is not just *an* intermediary – she is *the* intermediary. In a subsequent encyclical Leo reaffirmed Mary's unique status "by the side of the throne of God as Mediatrix of Divine grace".[405] Marina Warner explained what this means in plain language:

> … she is entitled to a special worship of her own - *hyperdulia*. God is owed *latria* (adoration) and the saints *dulia* (veneration), but Mary occupies the principal mediating position, as a creature belonging both to earth and heaven.[406]

So how did Mary go from being a thorn in her son's side while she was alive to such an elevated standing after her death? To answer this question we must return to the Bible.

The Book of Revelation described a conflict between "a woman clothed with the sun" and "a great red dragon".[407] Some authorities interpret this as depicting the battle between Christianity and the devil; others equate the woman with Mary the mother of Jesus. If the second interpretation is correct, then this must be one of the earliest portrayals of Jesus' mother as a mythological being of tremendous power and influence.

A similar picture is to be found in the Gospel stories of Jesus' conception and birth. Although there are lots of mentions of Mary in these passages, I omitted them from my earlier analysis because they do not deal with the relationship between Jesus and his mother.[408] However they are important in showing us the basis of Mary's supposed ascent into heavenly glory. According to one of the Gospels, Mary herself foresaw this during a visit to her cousin Elizabeth.

> For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.[409]

The two books of the New Testament from which these extracts come are believed to have been written during the second half of the first century. Since then the beliefs and legends that have grown up about Jesus' mother have inspired many painters, poets, and musicians to represent the mythological Mary in their work.[410] Moreover, numerous popes (in addition to Leo XIII) have used their high office to promote Mary as a heavenly 'go-between' - or 'mediatrix' in ecclesiastical language.

Pius X called her "the most powerful mediatrix and advocate of the

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[405] Leo XIII, 'Iucunda semper expectatione', 8 Sep 1894, *Holy See* [https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_08091894_iucunda-semper-expectatione.html], 15 Aug. 2022.
[406] Warner, *Alone of all her sex,* p. xxii.
[407] Revelation 12:1-6.
[408] The First Mary (Part 1): Bad blood between Jesus and his mother on page 260.
[409] Luke 1:48-49.
[410] Among countless examples are Fra Angelico's *The Annunciation* (c. 1435), William Wordsworth's *The Virgin* (1822), and Francis Poulenc's *Litanies à la Vierge Noire* (1936).

whole world with her Divine Son".[411] In another encyclical published half-a-century later, Pius XII referred to the "exceptional role in the work of our eternal salvation" bestowed on Mary by God.[412] More recently, in an address to the crowds gathered in St. Peter's Square, Pope Benedict XVI "invoke[d] the intercession of Mary Most Holy, Mediatrix of grace" to halt the various wars raging across the world.[413]

Among the other prayers I recall from my youth is the 'Apostle's Creed'. This ancient prayer itemises the essential beliefs of Christianity and includes the line that Jesus "ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty".[414] However it does not state that Mary is also part of that divine circle, nor does it allude to the powerful influence she is said to exert over Jesus.

I have argued in this series that, while they both lived in Palestine as mother and son, Mary tried to thwart Jesus' mission to free humanity from the grip of evil. Has that conflict continued into the next life?

Was Mary's elevation to the heavenly pantheon conceived and promoted in order to persuade us of her unique access to God? Were the Marian prayers, the great art, the papal pronouncements, etc., created so as to foster the impression in the minds of many millions of people that Mary is Jesus' partner, not his adversary?

If so it means that, for almost 2,000 years, humanity has been subjected to one of the most sustained - and successful - propaganda campaigns in history.

THE FIRST MARY (PART 5): "...WEEPING, EXHORTATION, PLEADING, THREATENING, AND MIRACLES..."

First published: 03 September 2022

Up until the middle of the 20th century it seemed as if the Roman Catholic Church was going to promote Mary all the way to the top of the divine pantheon. No one said it openly, but that was the thrust of Church policy as enunciated by pope after pope.

In 1954 Pius XII declared that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was 'the Queen of all creatures, the Queen of the world, and the Ruler of all'. Although for this pontiff Jesus was the undoubted king, Mary was more than

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411 Pius X, 'Ad diem illum laetissimum', 2 Feb. 1904, *Holy See* [https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_02021904_ad-diem-illum-laetissimum.html], 15 Aug. 2022.

412 Pius XII, 'Ad caeli reginam', 11 Oct. 1954, *Holy See* [https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_11101954_ad-caeli-reginam.html], 15 Aug 2022.

413 Benedict XVI, 'Angelus', 20 Jan. 2013, *Holy See* [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2013/documents/hf_ben-xvi_ang_20130120.html], 15 Aug . 2022.

414 *Catechism* (1951), pp. 1-2.

just the king's mother - she was his queen, his 'associate in the redemption'.[415]

However, the momentum towards the deification of Mary came to a halt during the 1960s. The Second Vatican Council, with its emphasis on ending divisions with the other Christian denominations, made this inevitable. Protestants generally honour and revere Mary, but they draw the line at any suggestion that she is on the same level as Jesus. So they had to be appeased.

Ever since Cardinal Angelo Roncalli assumed the papacy in 1958 as John XXIII, popes have tended to play down Mary's posthumous role so as not to offend Protestant sensibilities. Nonetheless they still assert her position as a kind of universal mother. When the present incumbent, Pope Francis, insisted recently that Mary should not be regarded as either a 'goddess' or a 'co-redeemer', he also affirmed her status as 'our mother, the Mother of the Church'.[416]

The post-Vatican II concept of Mary as 'mother' is probably more apt today than depicting her as a 'queen' who rules the roost. When anyone thinks of Queen Elizabeth II, for instance, they hardly imagine that she exerts real political power over the UK government or the British people. These days she is regarded as more of a maternal figure, whose advice and influence are valued by her adult children.[417] So too with Mary, at least as far as many Roman Catholics are concerned. And if anything has boosted this image of Mary as mother it is surely the Marian apparitions that have been reported around the world.

Many Christians believe that Mary has appeared miraculously in various places since she lived in Palestine 2,000 years ago. While reports of Marian apparitions have been recorded since the earliest days of Christianity, they have become more frequent in the last two centuries. According to one commentator, during these appearances Mary is

> intervening with weeping, exhortation, pleading, threatening, and miracles, to turn people away from their folly and wickedness and to urge them to pray and do penance.[418]

Of the scores of Marian apparitions reported to have taken place since the

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[415] Pius XII, 'Ad caeli reginam', 11 Oct. 1954, *Holy See* [https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_11101954_ad-caeli-reginam.html], 30 Aug 2022.
[416] Francis, 'General audience', 24 Mar. 2021, *Holy See* [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2021/documents/papa-francesco_20210324_udienza-generale.html], 30 Aug. 2022.
[417] Former British prime minster, John Major, is reported to have observed: 'At about the time the Queen Mother died, the Queen effectively became the "mother of the nation"'. (*Mail Online*, 25 Sep. 2011 [https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2041776/Queen-Elizabeth-Private-thoroughly-modern-monarch.html], 31 Aug 2022).
[418] Sandra Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary: From La Salette to Medjugorje* (Princeton, N.J., 1991), p. 246.

early-19th century, only a few have received ecclesiastical sanction. Probably the best known of these are Lourdes and Fatima. While these places attract thousands of visitors each year, large numbers of pilgrims also flock to unapproved sites like Medjugorje in Bosnia. It seems that, in their eagerness to show their devotion to the mother of Jesus, ordinary Catholics are not prepared to wait for the Church's seal of approval. Perhaps visitors to places like Medjugorje see Mary as bypassing the official Church in order to speak directly to her people?

How can the Marian apparitions be explained? Are they the result of human trickery or could some at least be supernatural in origin? Whatever the answer, one thing is certain. Those who believe that the apparitions are genuine are in no doubt that Mary is on their side, even to the extent of intervening from time to time to save humanity from the fierce retribution of a vengeful God.

The belief that Mary is more than an intercessor between God and his people - that she is uniquely able to prevent God or Jesus from destroying us all - goes back a long way. Two medieval legends portray Mary as either beseeching Jesus on her knees to show mercy when he was aiming three lances at the world, or physically restraining him as he was about to wipe humanity off the map.[419] The same idea can be detected in two of the approved Marian apparitions: La Salette and Fatima.

In 1846 a woman, assumed to be Mary, appeared to two peasant children near the village of La Salette in the French Alps. Years later the older of the two, Melanie Calvat, wrote her own account of the apparition, including details of what the woman said to them. Here are a few extracts from the utterances of the woman, who Melanie referred to as 'the Beautiful Lady'.[420]

> If My people do not wish to submit themselves, I am forced to let go of the hand of My Son. It is so heavy and weighs Me down so much I can no longer keep hold of it.
>
> All the time I have suffered for the rest of you! If I do not wish My Son to abandon you, I must take it upon Myself to pray for this continually. And the rest of you, you think little of this. In vain you will pray, in vain you will act, you will never be able to make up for the troubles I have taken for the rest of you.
>
> Mankind must expect to be ruled with an iron rod and to drink from the chalice of the wrath of God.

These extracts suggest that Mary presented herself at La Salette as a mother defending her children against a tyrannical male. He could be the woman's husband or her adult son, i.e. God the Father or Jesus. Whoever he is, Mary implied that the struggle to keep him in check was taking its

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[419] Ibid, p. 7.

[420] Abbé Gouin, *Sister Mary of the Cross, Shepherdess of La Salette* (Guildford, c. 1981), pp. 61-9.

toll and making her weary. In fact she seemed thoroughly fed up at the lack of appreciation for her efforts from those whom she was protecting.

She then alluded to a passage from the Book of Revelation in which the author wrote of 'a woman clothed with the sun [who] brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron'.[421] If, as many theologians and biblical scholars believe, the woman is Mary herself then her son wielding the 'iron rod' must be Jesus.

In 1917, seventy years after La Salette, Mary is said to have appeared several times to three children who were tending sheep in a remote part of Portugal, outside the village of Fatima. In one of her visits she showed the children a vision of hell that, according to the young witnesses, 'horrified us and made us tremble with fear'. Mary told them that, in order to save souls from this terrible fate, 'God wishes to establish devotion to my Immaculate Heart in the world'. Mary then added, 'If you do what I shall tell you, many souls will be saved and there will be peace'.[422]

Although here Mary was setting down a new condition for continuing to act on our behalf, i.e. "devotion to my Immaculate Heart", her message is fundamentally the same as at La Salette: only she has the authority and the wherewithal to save us from God's anger.

It is impossible to prove that any of the Marian apparitions were authentic. Despite the Church's approval of a handful of the modern claims, belief in them rests with the individual – no one is compelled to regard any apparition as an article of faith. However, for me, Mary's alleged appearances at La Salette and Fatima carry the ring of truth because they seem to shed light on an incident I discussed in Part 1 of this series.[423] This is the Gospel account of Mary's arrival at Jesus' home with her other children during the confrontation with her eldest son.[424]

Could what Mary is reported to have said during the apparitions be based on *her* version of that attack? Do the apparitions give Mary (or her spirit) the opportunity to reiterate the allegation that Jesus is deranged or possessed by evil? Could this explain the extraordinary claims she has made, or which have been made on her behalf, that she has to intervene from time to time to protect the world from her intemperate son?

Yet there is nothing in the New Testament to support this picture of Jesus. I have already discussed the only event that comes close, i.e. Jesus' reported expulsion of the money-changers from the temple in Jerusalem.[425] But could that justify his depiction in the apparition accounts as an angry and impatient fanatic?

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[421] Revelation 13:1-5.
[422] Fr. Louis Kondor (ed.), *Fatima in Lucia's own words: Sister Lucia's memoirs* (16th ed., Fatima, 2007), pp. 123-4.
[423] The First Mary (Part 1): Bad blood between Jesus and his mother on page 260.
[424] Mark 3:20-35.
[425] John, 2:13-16.

In an earlier article I argued that Jesus wanted to end our dependence on money because he believed it held us back from God.[426] However he was tolerant towards those who worked in finance – after all one of his disciples was a tax collector. What enraged him about the temple episode was that the money-changers were plying their trade inside his 'Father's house', an activity he must have found insufferable in such a holy place.

In general, however, the Gospels reveal Jesus to have been a considerate and thoughtful man who displayed a high level of understanding towards those whom the clerical authorities condemned as "sinners".

As I contended last time, humanity has been hoodwinked about the true nature of Jesus' attitude towards his mother. The Marian apparitions add further weight to the charge of duplicity. The overall effect is to distance people from God and from Jesus, while simultaneously drawing them into an ever-stronger dependence on Mary as their 'protective mother'.

Finally, I ask the reader to reflect on those descriptions of Mary left to us by Pope Pius XII and John the Evangelist. Pius called Mary "the Ruler of all", while John referred to her as the mother of "one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron". Although written many centuries apart, these two phrases are eerily similar to each other.

They also bring to mind a description I discussed in an earlier article, i.e. "the ruler of this world", a term that Jesus applied - not to himself - but to Satan.[427]

[426] Money (Part 3): A warning from the past on page 221.
[427] The ruler of this world: Time to go? on page 143.

COMMUNISM (PART 1): SMALL C OR BIG C?

First published: 01 October 2022

Communism: does it really matter if the initial letter is upper or lower case? If my interpretation of two pieces of literature on the subject is correct, then "Yes" is the answer. One of my sources is a famous pamphlet first published in 1848. The other is a lengthy – and recent - meditation on the financial history of the last 5,000 years.

I begin with the second work which was written in response to the international economic crisis of the early-21st century. The author, David Graeber (1961-2020), was an anthropologist and self-acknowledged anarchist who helped found the 'Occupy Wall Street' movement in 2011.[428] So he was definitely on the left of the political spectrum – if that still means anything today!

In his book Graeber argued that "All of us act like communists a good deal of the time". (Note the small 'c'.) His examples of what he called "everyday communism" range from the minor acts of courtesy many of us engage in, like giving directions to a stranger on the street, to the informal collaboration that occurs all the time between workers in a factory or office.[429] Graeber might also have mentioned a scene in the movie, *Witness*, when members of an Amish community combine their strength and skills to build a barn for one of their number.

Graeber maintained that those who take part in these apparently selfless transactions do not keep an account because they assume "that the other person *would* do the same for [them], not that they necessarily *will*". His anthropological research told him that these and other kinds of communist behaviour spring from our tribal inheritance. We trust those we believe to be like us – our fellow tribesmen if you will - but we are generally suspicious of strangers.

Of course the person asking for directions will probably be a stranger. However, if he or she is a member - or possible member - of our 'tribe', we are usually happy to engage with them. As Graeber pointed out, this works both ways:

> a middle-class pedestrian would be unlikely to ask a gang member for directions, and might even run in fear if one approached him to ask for the time.[430]

When presented in these terms, Graeber's case that communism is a natural part of the human condition seems pretty self-evident, doesn't it? We don't *have* to co-operate with or help others but, if the circumstances are

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[428] *David Graeber Institute* [https://davidgraeber.org/about-david-graeber/], 29 Sep. 2022.

[429] David Graeber, *Debt: The first 5,000 years* (10th anniversary edition, New York 2021), pp. 95-100 passim.

[430] Ibid, p. 413, fn. 13.

right, we give of our time and energy without expecting anything in return. Graeber was so convinced of our species' innate communism that he described it as "the foundation of all human sociability". "It is", he asserted, "what makes society possible".[431]

If that is "everyday communism", what about Communism (with a big 'C')?

For Karl Marx (1818-1883), Communism and coercion went hand in hand. In his *Communist Manifesto* published in 1848, Marx expressed his disdain for those likeminded activists who

> wish to attain their ends by peaceful means, and endeavour, by small experiments, necessarily doomed to failure, and by the force of example, to pave the way for the new social Gospel.[432]

Marx did not like "peaceful means", "small experiments", or "force of example", because they were too slow. He wanted revolution *now*. According to Marx, it was a Utopian fantasy to imagine that the "selfish" rich could be persuaded over time to relinquish their wealth and power in order to bring about a more equitable society.[433] He asserted that the elites would never give up their privileges unless they had to. The only response to the injustices of society was Communism.

Marx did not hide the compulsory nature of what he was proposing in his *Manifesto*. He urged "the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class", because his Communist ideal could not be achieved "except by means of *despotic* inroads on the rights of property".[434] What might have been natural and organic at a time when people lived in tribal communities would now have to be imposed by force and that force, Marx insisted, would lie "in the hands of the State".[435] In short, the State would restore Eden – regardless of its citizens' wishes.

George Orwell described the practical application of Marx's theories as "a boot stamping on a human face – for ever".[436] During the 20th century a succession of tyrants, Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse-tung, etc., demonstrated exactly what Orwell's vivid metaphor would mean for us all if we ever fell into their clutches.

Was it foreseeable that Karl Marx's proposal to create a classless society would translate into state-sponsored terror, exemplified by the Soviet gulags and the Cambodian killing fields? Given the uncompromisingly aggressive language of his 1848 pamphlet, Marx must have anticipated considerable popular resistance - so, yes. That is why he nominated the "State" as the only power capable of imposing his plan, thus enabling "the

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[431] Ibid, p. 95.
[432] *Communist Manifesto*, p. 116.
[433] Ibid, p. 100.
[434] Ibid, pp. 119, 104 (emphasis added).
[435] Ibid, p. 104.
[436] George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Penguin edition, London 2013), p. 307.

forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions".[437]

But that was then and this is now. Since the collapse of the USSR more than 30 years ago, the prospect of otherwise free peoples being frog-marched into Communism against their will is remote. At around the same time another Marxist bastion, China, developed its own brand of totalitarian capitalism to become the world's go-to manufacturer of everything from iPods to religious statuary to luxury sun-glasses. Both developments made it crystal clear that the West had won the Cold War. At long last we could relax, couldn't we?

However, as the threat of Orwell's "boot on the face" was receding, Communism was mutating into a new variant adapted to the modern age of PR and advertising. In fact, even before the dissolution of the Soviet empire, a more subtle and sophisticated form of Marx's "despotic inroads" was in the pipeline. This was the "long march through the institutions" strategy promoted during the 1960s, and which I wrote about elsewhere.[438] Marx himself might have dismissed it as an example of the 'softly-softly' approach he deplored. Nevertheless the modern Communists behind the "long march" plan have made remarkable progress during the last half-century or so, especially in the affluent West.

Although signs of that success were difficult to detect up to 2020, events over the last two-and-a-half years have revealed just how much our civilisation has been transformed. Under cover of a WHO-declared pandemic, those who used the "long march" to gain control of the levers of power have outdone even Stalin and Mao. We have experienced a degree of state control over the minutiae of citizens' lives previously seen only in places like the now defunct Soviet bloc. Not only was this revolution launched without tanks and guns, it has proceeded with the consent of citizens around the world.

In Ireland during the Covid period, examples of the state's abusive intrusions were legion. They included quarantining healthy people in their homes or neighbourhoods, banning religious services, and imposing vaccine passports as a requirement to re-enter society – all accepted as necessary by the population.

An example of state aspirations to control everyone and everything can be found in a BBC report about the Irish Covid supremo, Dr Anthony Holohan. The British broadcaster stated that Holohan was using data from Apple smartphones "that seemed to indicate an increase in the numbers, driving, walking and using public transport". According to the article, this information was leading to "concern" on Holohan's part because it meant

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[437] *Communist Manifesto*, p. 120.

[438] Bunúis na réabhlóide, ("Origins of the revolution") 4/5 on page 65.

"that people were relaxing their behaviour."[439]

Perhaps the most audacious aspect of the "long march" plan was the attempt to exploit humanity's natural tendency to put the needs of fellow tribe-members before their own, i.e. the age-old communist impulse described by Graeber. This part of the plan comprised two complementary tactics:

1. Forbid or discourage close contact between individuals, whether in the form of casual chats in the street or sexual intimacy in the bedroom.
2. Advocate or mandate the wearing of face masks and getting vaccinated.

The first attempted to erode social cohesion by outlawing traditional forms of human interaction. The second sought to exploit our natural instinct to protect each other by imposing practices that were useless, or even harmful. These heartless perversions of *Homo sapiens'* intrinsic communal feelings were pushed by opinion leaders and celebrities across the planet.

Countless newspaper columnists, 'blue tick' Twitter accounts, and rock stars harangued the public into donning face masks because as one journalist asserted

> Pandemics only stop when scientists find a vaccine. Until then it's selfish and unpatriotic to refuse to wear a mask in public, when studies show it's the only tool we have to fight the spread.[440]

The UK's Queen Elizabeth II joined in, implying that anyone hesitant about vaccination was being selfish. She was quoted as saying that "they ought to think about other people rather than themselves".[441]

These are just two examples of the social shaming that was deployed by the "long march" planners. It was cheap and efficient and ensured that most people fell into line with the new tribal 'rules'. On its own it would probably have engendered widespread compliance, as long as the public continued to absorb the propaganda. However, with brute force off the table, a second tool was needed to copper-fasten universal submission.

At the root of the "long march" strategy was an assumption that our dependence on the world's financial system, on money itself, would make us amenable to whatever the planners had in mind. No one would dare put their income or assets at risk by resisting authority, would they?

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[439] *BBC News*, 'Coronavirus: Ireland uses earthquake technology to monitor movements', 24 Apr 2020 [https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52410280], 30 Sep 2022.
[440] *Irish Central*, 19 Jun. 2020 [https://www.irishcentral.com/opinion/cahirodoherty/mask-pandemic-selfish], 30 Sep 2022.
[441] *The Irish Post*, 26 Feb. 2021 [https://www.irishpost.com/news/queen-elizabeth-calls-people-who-refuse-covid-19-vaccine-selfish-204778], 30 Sep. 2022.

COMMUNISM (PART 2): "MONEY DOESN'T TALK, IT SWEARS." (BOB DYLAN)

First published: 15 October 2022

In a previous article I alluded to a poem entitled 'Money-madness' by English writer D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930).[442] In his poem Lawrence described in a few vivid lines how money affects us.

> We quail, money makes us quail.
> It has got us down, we grovel before it in strange terror.
> And no wonder, for money has a fearful cruel power among men.[443]

Even allowing some latitude for 'poetic licence', wasn't Lawrence correct in suggesting that money exerts a mesmeric, or even mystical, effect on us - that sometimes it can overwhelm our senses? Lawrence deplored our dependence on money, even for life's essentials. His alternative?

> Bread should be free,
> shelter should be free,
> fire should be free
> to all and anybody, all and anybody, all over the world.[444]

Those who infer from this that Lawrence was a Marxist would be mistaken. In a letter he sent in December 1928 to a left-wing journalist named Charles Wilson, Lawrence made it clear that he had little time for Marx's vision.

> The dead materialism of Marx Socialism and Soviets seems to me no better than what we've got. What we want is life and *trust*: men trusting men, and making living a free thing, not a thing to be *earned*. But if men trusted men, we could soon have a new world, and send this one to the devil.[445]

If D. H. Lawrence believed that his dream of "men trusting men" could not be found in either Capitalism or Communism, what was his remedy for our 'money-madness'?

> What we want is some sort of communism
> Not based on wages, nor profits, nor any sort of buying and selling
> But on a religion of life.[446]

Throughout history there have been numerous attempts to create Lawrence's small 'c' communism. I wrote about one of those elsewhere.[447] Another is the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SVP). Its members collect donations from those who can afford to give something and distribute the money to the needy. Is there a more practical and straightforward example of everyday communism in today's world?

The SVP has about 11,500 members in Ireland and is one of the coun-

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[442] Money (Part 1): "Money is our madness, our vast collective madness." (D.H. Lawrence) on page 214.
[443] 'Money-madness', Lawrence, *Complete poems*, pp. 486-7.
[444] Ibid.
[445] Ibid., p. 1003 (emphasis in original).
[446] 'The root of our evil' , Lawrence, *Complete poems*, pp. 482-3.
[447] Domhan gan airgead ("A world without money") on page 119.

try's best-known voluntary organisations. Although the SVP helps Christians and non-Christians alike, the society has always had strong ties to the Roman Catholic Church. These ties are made clear in a recent SVP publication.

> The work of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is carried out in accord with the teaching and the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church.[448]

When in 2018 the Irish government announced its intention to remove the ban on abortion from the Constitution, some members of the SVP expected the organisation to oppose the plan. This expectation arose from the Catholic Church's longstanding opposition to abortion.

However, in an open letter, the president of the Irish branch of the SVP declared that the Society would *not* be advising the general public or its own members to vote against abortion in the forthcoming referendum. As the letter explained:

> It should…be understood that the Society of St Vincent de Paul is a *registered charity* and is therefore *constrained by law* from involvement in political campaigns which are not aligned to our charitable objectives.[449]

The law referred to in the letter is the Charities Act of 2009. Its main purpose was to set up a new body known as the Charities Regulator, which would "establish and maintain a public register of charitable organisations operating in Ireland". The Charities Regulator's stated mission is

> To regulate the charity sector in the public interest so as to ensure compliance with the law and support best practice in the governance, management and administration of charities.[450]

The Act itself is a lengthy document (82 pages) so the Regulator distilled its terms into reasonably plain English. Here is what the Regulator's summary had to say about the legal constraint mentioned in the SVP letter:

> The use of *charitable funds* and resources by a charity for the purpose of engaging in activities to promote a political cause is only permissible if it can be shown that the activity is directly advancing or supporting the *charitable purpose* of the charity.[451]

The Regulator went on to explain the consequences for any registered charity that broke the law.

> An existing registered Irish charity risks breaching the Charities Act 2009 and losing its *charitable status* where it seeks to promote a political cause which does not directly advance its charitable purpose.[452]

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[448] *International Confederation of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul*, 19 Aug 2019 [https://www.ssvpglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/29. -Should-our-assistance-be-on-going-and-only-for-Catholics.pdf], 13 Oct. 2022.
[449] *Irish Catholic*, 3 May 2018 (emphasis added).
[450] *Charities Regulator* [https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/en/who-we-are/what-we-do], 8 Oct. 2022.
[451] Charities Regulator, *Guidance on Charities and the Promotion of Political Causes* (Sep. 2021), p. 7 (emphasis added).
[452] Ibid.

The SVP seems to have decided that expressing its views on the government's intention to permit abortion would amount to "promot[ing] a political cause which does not directly advance its charitable purpose", i.e. alleviating poverty, and therefore would be illegal.

According to the Charities Act, losing its charitable status would make the SVP an "excluded body", and it would be removed from the Regulator's register.[453] This would have devastating consequences for the charity. Not only might a senior officer like the president face a fine of up to €300,000 for speaking out against what the Act described as "public policy" - in this case the legalisation of abortion - the SVP itself could suffer a huge hit to its finances.[454]

At this time the SVP received fifteen per cent of its yearly income from the government. This amounted to about €12m per annum. Here are the figures for 2017-2019:

Description	2017	2018	2019
Total income	€82,163,000	€80,553,000	€83,320,000
Government funding (amount)	€12,500,000	€12,000,000	€12,500,000
Government funding (percentage)	15.21%	14.90%	15.00%

As an "excluded body" the SVP would be prohibited from communicating with the public, thereby undermining its *raison d'etre*, i.e. receiving money from those who have it and giving it to those who need it.[455] If that happened, it is hard to see how the government could continue to provide financial support. Without all that money, the SVP would surely go out of business?

In reality the risk of the SVP "losing its charitable status" was slim. A scenario in which the government would take on a beloved organisation like the SVP in a public battle - a battle it could hardly hope to win – is difficult to envisage. Yet, as far as the SVP was concerned, the threat of becoming an "excluded body" was real enough to keep it out of the abortion debate.

On May 25th 2018 the constitutional amendment to permit abortion was passed by a huge majority of Irish voters. Would the outcome have been different if the SVP had campaigned openly against the government? Perhaps, who knows?

As I asserted in Part 1, those behind the "long march" strategy have sought to pervert the sense of communal trust at the heart of our humanity. Money has been a key component of their efforts – the problem is proving it. There is no paper trail, no archive of documentary sources, no

[453] Ibid. Charities Act 2009, Part 1, Section 2, p. 10.
[454] Charities Act 2009, Part 1, Section 10, p. 15.
[455] Ibid, Part 3, Section 46 (2), p. 39.

hard evidence that the researcher can access to reveal the activities of the "long march" strategists. Those who have infiltrated the political, religious, and commercial life of this country were never going to leave traces of their true purpose behind. So whether the case of the SVP and the abortion referendum is an unforeseen consequence of a law enacted a decade earlier, or an example of the "long march" strategy in action, is a matter for the reader to decide.

Sometimes I think art or poetry is a better way to expose the money trap than historical research. Take for example the Bob Dylan song, "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)". The song first appeared on Dylan's LP *Bringing It All Back Home* released in March 1965. This extract suggests that the writer was close in his thinking to that other poet, D. H. Lawrence.

> While money doesn't talk, it swears
> Obscenity, who really cares
> Propaganda, all is phony[456]

As I argued in an earlier series, our money system corrupts and corrodes the instincts and feelings that make us fully human.[457] This is true even when it is used with the best intentions, as Francis of Assisi discovered.[458] So if our dependence on money is the problem, is the goal of trying to redistribute it more fairly, as the SVP does for instance, actually counterproductive?

It seems to me that it is akin to offering a heroin addict a methadone substitute as a safer alternative. Surely it would be far better to help the user end his/her dependence on drugs altogether?

However as long as we are *all* hooked, how could that possibly happen?

COMMUNISM (PART 3): A BEAUTIFUL DOCTRINE?

First published: 12 November 2022

In a recent video available to watch on the Internet one of the speakers declares that "Capitalism as we know it is dead". The speaker is not Rudi Dutschke or Peter Camejo, two student radicals who, during the 1960s, advocated the "long march" strategy as their preferred means of turning the world into a Communist paradise.[459]

No, the spokesman in the video is not your typical leftie. He is Marc Benioff, a middle-aged American billionaire who is Chief Executive Officer

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[456] *Bob Dylan* [https://www.bobdylan.com/songs/its-alright-ma-im-only-bleeding/], 14 Oct. 2022.

[457] Money (Part 1): "Money is our madness, our vast collective madness." (D.H. Lawrence) on page 214.

[458] Domhan gan airgead ("A world without money") on page 119.

[459] Bunúis na réabhlóide, ("Origins of the revolution") 4/5 and 5/5 on pages 65 and 67.

of Salesforce, a software company employing 75,000 people.[460] In the video Benioff continued his obituary for Capitalism:

> This obsession we have had with maximising profits for shareholders alone has led to incredible inequality and planetary emergency.

The video is one of many produced by the World Economic Forum (WEF) to promote its "Great Reset", and available on its YouTube channel.[461] Although so far in this series I have not mentioned the Great Reset, I have been trying to describe the context in which it was developed. However, before I examine the WEF initiative more closely, I need to flesh out that context a little more.

In Part 1 of 'Communism' I stated that one of the assumptions underpinning the "long march" strategy is that we, the intended targets of the strategy, would do nothing to jeopardise our access to money.[462] As I indicated in that article and elsewhere, this is true even for those who are managing money that does not actually belong to them.

Apart from our relationship with money, the "long march" planners subscribe to another important tenet: human beings, *Homo sapiens*, would never willingly adopt Communism as *the* guiding principle in their lives. The reason why may be gleaned from an article published nearly a century ago.

> Communism would have all men throw their efforts in the help of one another, join in owning all things together, work unanimously for the common good, and ask only that which each needs, according to the means of the entire association. It is a beautiful doctrine; but an impossible one to put into practice, for all human beings are selfish; each, with only a few exceptions, wishes to get all he can and give as little as he can.[463]

Two quite different authors, journalist George Orwell and novelist Charlotte Brontë, would have probably agreed with the assertion in this extract that "all human beings are selfish… with only a few exceptions". Orwell's and Bronte's writings reveal the indifference and outright disdain often shown to those on the fringes of society. In *Down and Out in Paris and London* Orwell described going hungry after one of his English language students disappeared without paying his outstanding fee of twelve francs.[464] Jane Eyre, the starving protagonist of Bronte's eponymous novel, is turned away by a shopkeeper to whom she offers her handkerchief in exchange for food.[465]

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[460] *Forbes* [https://www.forbes.com/profile/marc-benioff/?sh=6dc6b4bf3ee0]. *Salesforce* [https://www.salesforce.com/company/leadership/bios/bio-benioff/]. 10 Nov. 2022.
[461] World Economic Forum, 'What is the Great Reset? | Davos Agenda 2021', *YouTube*.
[462] Communism (Part 1): Small c or big C? on page 278.
[463] C.P. Dadant, 2 Oct. 1924, from 'Documents pertaining to the Icarian Community in Illinois and Iowa, 1855-1942'.
[464] Orwell, *Non-Fiction*, p. 18.
[465] Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, in *The Bronte Sisters: The Complete Novels*, p. 323.

Whether or not the authors intended it, their readers are left with one rather off-putting message: no one should even *think* about heading down the moneyless path alone.

Perhaps being part of a less materialistic community is the answer, one that is not focused on individual advancement and economic growth? If the world around us will not change, maybe some kind of alternative sub-group would work?

There are lots of examples around today and in previous articles I discussed a few, principally the Amish community, the Franciscan order, and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SVP). Each of these groups allows its members to deviate from conventional money-related norms. In the case of the SVP that deviation may last only a few hours per week. For the Amish and Franciscans it is likely to be an all-day, everyday way of life.

However the fact that these organisations have endured for so long, sometimes centuries, is due to one crucial factor: they have not separated completely from the world's money system. Their dependence on that system, through trade, patronage, etc., is crucial to their continued existence.

Those few other organisations that aspired to *total* independence from the world, unlike the bodies mentioned above, have not lasted very long. Two examples – Icaria and Rananim - underline this reality.

Étienne Cabet (1788-1856), was a French-born, left-leaning philosopher who in the mid-19th century founded the Icarian movement. A sympathetic observer explained Cabet's motivation.

> [He] was of the opinion that the cause of failure of Communism in previous times was due to its having been tried under the influences of individualistic conditions. He thought that if he could take devoted men away from the influences of our selfish conditions of society, he could train them to become true followers of Christ's doctrines of mutual love.[466]

Mainly through the force of his personality Cabet drew a set of idealistic followers around him to help make Icaria a reality. They set up a number of small communities across the United States to put Cabet's ideas into practice. Although the movement continued for several decades after Cabet's death, it petered out around the turn of the 20th century. In his study of Cabet and Icaria, an historian of the movement offered this explanation for the group's demise:

> The Icarian communities did not last because they were built primarily upon ideals and morality and only secondarily upon sensible community rules, efficient economic production, and physical well-being.[467]

In other words, Cabet's Icaria kept going for half-a-century through the

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[466] Dadant, 2 Oct. 1924.

[467] Robert P. Sutton, *Les Icariens: The Utopian Dream in Europe and America* (Chicago 1994), p. 147.

sheer enthusiasm of its members - not because its leaders had set up a practical structure everyone could live under. In the end, the Icarians found it impossible to practise communism in a capitalist world.

A second example stems from D. H. Lawrence and his attitude to money. Like Cabet, he wanted to turn his theories into practice. In 1915, Lawrence described the sort of alternative society he had in mind.

> I want to gather together about twenty souls and sail away from this world of war and squalor and found a little colony where there shall be no money but a sort of communism as far as necessaries of life go, and some real decency. It is to be a colony built up on the real decency which is in each member of the community. A community which is established upon the assumption of goodness in its members, instead of the assumption of badness.[468]

Although Lawrence tried to put flesh on these bones by setting up his Rananim colony in the United States, it never got off the ground. Even before his early death at the age of 44, he could see it would not work.

> That Rananim of ours, it has sunk out of sight.[469]

Now, in our own time, the WEF and its chairman, Klaus Schwab, are receiving a lot of attention for their launch of a similar undertaking. However they are not interested in sub-groups or alternative communities like Icaria or Rananim. Perhaps they have learnt from these failures that it is either all or nothing? In any event their ambitions are much greater. They want to transform our entire civilisation into something very different to anything we have seen before. Hence the Great Reset.

What would such a transformed world look like? Another of their videos offers a glimpse:

> You'll own nothing. And you'll be happy. Whatever you want you'll rent and it'll be delivered by drone.[470]

A recent article on the WEF's web site explains how this might work.

> In a performance economy, which encompasses one of the economic principles of a circular economy, a smaller number of *asset owners* will take custodianship of assets to keep them in use and provide services to many users based on consumption… The advantage… is that the payment is related to the level of consumption, rather than what is being paid to get access to the asset (i.e. the price of ownership).[471]

Customers of Spotify will recognise the model. They can listen to virtually

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[468] Letter DHL to W. E. Hopkins, 18 Jan. 1915, in George J. Zytaruk (ed.), *The quest for Rananim; D.H. Lawrence's letters to S.S. Koteliansky, 1914 to 1930* (Montreal 1970), p. 22 (fn.)p. 22.

[469] Letter DHL to S. S. Koteliansky , 4 Jan. 1926, in ibid., p. 276.

[470] World Economic Forum, '8 predictions for the world in 2030', *YouTube*.

[471] Dr Mayuri Wijayasundara, 'How a circular economy could help tackle Sri Lanka's economic crisis', Jul 5, 2022, World Economic Forum [https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/07/circular-economy-tackle-economic-crisis-sri-lanka/], 11 Nov. 2022 (emphasis added).

any piece of recorded music on their smartphone - as long as they pay the monthly subscription or listen to frequent ads. However, unlike physical CDs or digital downloads, they will never own any of the tracks.

Extended to everyday essentials like transport and clothing as the WEF propose, what we once viewed as personal property, like a car or a sweater, would become a service to be rented from one of the "asset owners", and presumably shared with others.[472]

Were the Great Reset to become a reality the "long march" strategists would have accomplished what Joseph Stalin, Étienne Cabet, and many others failed to achieve: the willing acceptance by everyone (even a billionaire businessman like Marc Benioff!) of Karl Marx's Communism, now rechristened as something else - like the WEF's anodyne "democratic globalism" for instance.[473]

But if Communism (with a big 'C') is the solution offered by the Great Reset, what about communism (with a small 'c')? It is, as the late David Graeber insisted, "what makes society possible".[474] If so, maybe the contention cited above that "all human beings are selfish" needs to be reconsidered? Indeed I am starting to believe that communism is so intrinsic to our humanity that, once we rediscover it in all its natural wonder, we will see the Great Reset as just a silly little counterfeit of the real thing.

COMMUNISM (PART 4): "I GOTTA HAVE FAITH, FAITH, FAITH" (GEORGE MICHAEL)

First published: 26 November 2022

Our world – the world of *Homo sapiens*, humanity - is built on faith. We believe in certain things and they become real to us. My dictionary defines faith as follows:

faith ► n. complete trust or confidence.

For the last three years or so, the faith of humanity has been directed towards a virus called SARS-CoV2 – a virus that cannot be detected with any of our human senses. We cannot touch it, taste it, smell it, hear it, or see it with the naked eye. Science tells us that this virus can be identified only through the use of a powerful electronic microscope. Yet, despite being almost wholly imperceptible, our faith in the virus' existence has transformed the way we live, perhaps permanently.

Money is even less real than the SARS-CoV2 virus. There is no technology that enables us to see it. Yet we have such "complete trust or con-

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[472] Ida Auken, 'Welcome to 2030. I own nothing, have no privacy, and life has never been better', 11 Nov. 2016, *World Economic Forum*.

[473] Alvin Carpio, 'The answer to nationalist fervour isn't less globalism. It's more', Jan 16, 2019, *World Economic Forum* [https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/01/the-answer-to-nationalist-fervour-isnt-less-globalism-its-more/], 11 Nov. 2022.

[474] Graeber, *Debt*, p. 95.

fidence" in it that it forms the very basis of our civilisation. Without our faith in money, we would not have jobs or consumables or technology, or any of the accoutrements we take for granted in the modern world. Without money we would not be able to buy or sell, and economic life as we know it would be impossible.

So what is money exactly? The things we regard as money, such as gold bars, coloured paper, or numbers on a computer screen, have no intrinsic value. We cannot eat them, or live in them, or wear them. But because everyone believes these things are valuable, they are. (You can read more of my ideas on this topic in a previous series.)[475]

Our faith in the SARS-CoV2 virus and money exists because we have been told by people we trust that they are real. These people may be scientists, politicians, or newsreaders. Whatever their qualifications, we invest our trust in them and so what they say becomes real to us. In fact it governs our lives. We feel safe when we wear a mask on the bus. We regard having money as essential. Not to follow these rules and axioms would endanger our health - our very existence even. That is what we have been told by people – people we probably don't know personally.

What if we redirected our faith in strangers to someone we *do* know – ourselves? What if we placed more trust in what we experience in our own lives, and less in what someone else tells us, via television for instance?

What can each of us actually see, hear, smell, or touch within our own world? If it is daytime, we can see the sun or the clouds in the sky. At night the stars shine in the darkness above, maybe the Moon too. We feel the heat or the cold in the air around us. If it is raining we get wet. We may catch the scent of herbs on the evening breeze or hear water gurgling in a nearby stream. If we take off our shoes we can feel the ground beneath our bare feet.

We don't need anyone else to tell us about these things because we experience them ourselves. We perceive them first-hand - they are real! But what if these apparently trivial moments are just the outward signs of a world that is far more wondrous than we perceive it to be? If we scratch below the surface, what else might we find?

Many years ago my uncle was taken to hospital with advanced terminal cancer. Since his retirement a few years earlier he had stayed mostly indoors, smoking incessantly as he watched the telly. Now his body was so riddled with disease that he could no longer rise from his armchair unaided.

However no sooner was my uncle in his hospital bed than he seemed to wake up, as if from a trance. When I visited him shortly after he was

[475] Money (Part 1): "Money is our madness, our vast collective madness." (D.H. Lawrence) on page 214.

admitted I was struck by the change in him. He told me that he was concentrating all his energies, all his thoughts, on recovering and leaving the hospital. He said that he could allow nothing to distract him from his goal, even eating and sleeping. So my uncle lay in bed all day, refusing food and staying awake – willing himself to get better.

At first his strategy seemed to be working. Instead of the few days that the hospital authorities expected he would last, my uncle was still there after nearly a month. By then he was skin and bone, but his eyes glowed fiercely in his head. Then one day when I went to see him his condition had deteriorated considerably. His voice was husky and barely audible. His eyes were dull. The spark was gone. A day or two later he was dead. What caused this rapid change?

Apparently a doctor came to see him the day before my last visit. She told him that he was dying of cancer, that they could do nothing to save him. She was a qualified medic and spoke with authority. He decided that she must be right. So he gave up the battle and succumbed to the cancer. Would he have recovered if that doctor had not spoken to him as she did? Probably not, but *could* he have recovered?

That is the great imponderable. We are told that the world works in a certain way and we believe what we are told. Yet, as my late uncle demonstrated, our faith in ourselves can be powerful. So what happens when our own instincts come up against an external authority? Which do we follow?

Of course we can research a topic to see whether or not our instincts have merit. However research takes time, and interest, and some level of expertise. My uncle certainly had the interest (he wanted to live!), but he did not have the time or the expertise.

For most of us the stakes are rarely as high as they were for my uncle. Perhaps we decide to purchase something very expensive, like a house or a car. Then we probably would do some research to make sure we don't make a terrible mistake. Even then (if my own history is any judge) trust plays a big part in the final decision, whether it is trust in the estate agent or the car salesman.

In day-to-day matters we rely on experts to tell us what is true and what is not. We can't research or investigate *everything* for ourselves, can we? Is President Biden really in charge of the US government? Did Neil Armstrong actually walk on the moon? We have been told that these things are true, and everyone else seems to believe them, so we do too.

Of course these external bits of news have no direct impact on us. If we never heard of Biden or Armstrong our lives would hardly be disturbed. Those intimate personal experiences are different however, whether it is hearing a blackbird singing in the garden or seeing a seal bob to the surface near the seashore. We perceive these moments as real without any second-guessing or even thought. But is there more?

To go back to my earlier question, what if such sights and sounds are not merely random incidents? Is it conceivable that they are signs of nature calling to us from afar - even flirting with us? This sounds daft I know, but as Shakespeare wrote a long time ago

> There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.[476]

Perhaps it is easier to think of my idea as a thought experiment, or an exotic hypothesis, which *might* be true. If so, what if we responded to nature's voice? What then?

The question is not as fanciful as it seems. After all, we live in turbulent times where the outlandish is becoming commonplace. The answer to my question could determine where, and in whom, we choose to place our faith in the future.

The Great Reset offers humanity a way to continue to participate in the world that money has built around us: the world of technology, of medicine, of *stuff*. The price is high though. We would have to allow those who have designed and are implementing the Great Reset to access our innermost thoughts and feelings. In return for convenience and safety, we would be surrendering our personal autonomy.

The alternative is unthinkable, though, isn't it: a return to a type of primitive barbarity that economist Adam Smith warned us about in the 18th century? (You can read my thoughts on Smith in an earlier article.[477]) But *is* that the only alternative? Or is it the only alternative the architects of the Great Reset want us to consider?

Over the last year-and-a-half of writing these musings, I have examined a diverse bunch of people: Jean-Paul Sartre, James Joyce, Étienne Cabet, Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky, Charlotte Brontë, etc. I suspect that my interest in these figures was sparked by a desire to learn the answer to that question, "What then?" Some of those I looked at, like Hans Christian Andersen and D. H. Lawrence, came close to providing that answer. Closest of them all I think was George Orwell, whom I am convinced really was "the saint of common decency".[478]

Yet none of them, not even Orwell, answered the question to my satisfaction. None of them revealed the genuine 'painting' of which the Great Reset is a "silly little counterfeit". None of them even confirmed the *existence* of a genuine 'painting' that the "long march" planners have been struggling to copy.

To extend the metaphor, I believe that authentic 'painting' *does* exist, although it is kept well out of sight, as if behind a locked door. However we have the key to that door. Our faith - *if* we can redirect it.

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[476] Cohen, *Penguin dictionary of quotations*, p. 349.
[477] Money (Part 2): Freedom or bondage? on page 217.
[478] *Guardian*, 7 Jun 2003.

COMMUNISM (PART 5): AMAZING GRACE

First published: 10 December 2022

Grace is as real as the sun that shines in the sky, or the air that we breathe, or the water we drink. In fact you could say that sunshine *is* grace, air *is* grace, water *is* grace. These are the basic necessities without which life would be impossible. Whether they come from God or nature is a matter of personal belief.

The term 'grace' is derived from two separate Latin roots: *gratis* or free of charge, and *gratus*, which translates as 'agreeable', 'kindness', or 'thankful'. The English words 'gratuity' and 'gratitude' reflect these different but connected meanings. In the spiritual or religious sense, 'grace' is defined in my dictionary as "the free and unearned favour of God".

Money is the antithesis of grace. Unlike grace it is not free at all. But grace is like money in one respect: faith is required to make it happen. Because we concentrate our faith on money, we allow ourselves only the bare minimum of grace necessary for survival. We take it for granted that the sun will rise every morning but anything more than that, like central heating or comfortable shoes, requires money doesn't it?

As long as we continue to think like this we will remain stuck in the money trap. But it is not just us. Money is of no interest to the flora and fauna with whom we share the planet. It is easy to forget that the examples of grace I mentioned (sun, air, water) are there not just for the benefit of *Homo sapiens*. Plants, animals, insects, even microbes need them too.

What if we humans refocused our faith away from the lie that is money, to something true and authentic: grace? What would life on earth be like then?

In my research for *History in the Making*, I have often used the Bible as a reference. Given the Bible's pervasive influence throughout history this is not surprising. In several articles I have focused on the Gospel accounts of Jesus Christ. As regular readers will realise my research has led me down some bumpy roads, theologically speaking. Anyone not put off by my sometimes strange conclusions may like to continue reading. Others should probably stop here.

As I realised after my experience in Jerusalem several decades ago, Jesus' very existence was such a reproach to the "ruler of this world" that, if Jesus himself could not be erased completely, his life would have to be misrepresented and distorted.[479] Since his execution 2,000 years ago Jesus' enemies have gone to enormous lengths to mislead the world about him. Yet, despite their efforts, the truth can still be found - even today.

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[479] The Real Jesus? An imagined dialogue between a 21st-century man and Jesus as he prays in the Garden of Gethsemane on page 176.

As with many sources available to the historian, the Gospels are like a jigsaw puzzle that is missing some pieces. To complicate matters, pieces from a different puzzle are mixed in as well. However, as long as enough of the correct pieces are present, the patient assembler can make a good stab at seeing what the full picture would look like. That is what I have tried to do in my reading of the Gospels.

Undoubtedly the strangest aspect of Jesus' public life are the miracles he performed. Most of these involved him healing people who suffered from life-limiting conditions such as leprosy and blindness. According to the Gospels there were even several cases where Jesus brought the dead back to life; the raising of Lazarus is probably the best-known example.

In many instances of Jesus restoring someone's health, the Gospel writers report that he focused on the 'faith' of the individual concerned, whether that be the sufferer him or herself or a close relative. In fact Jesus implied that it was the person's own faith, rather than any special powers Jesus possessed, that was responsible for their being healed.

When a leper who had just been cured of his terrible disease prostrated himself in thanks, Jesus said to him: "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well".[480]

In another episode two blind men followed Jesus into his home in Capernaum.

> Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord." Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you." And their eyes were opened.[481]

Even if the afflicted person was absent or unconscious, the Gospels make it clear that faith remained central to Jesus' intervention. For instance, when a man sought Jesus's help for his epileptic son Jesus responded: "All things are possible to him who believes".[482] In this case it was the father's faith that made the difference. We are told that Jesus "healed the boy, and gave him back to his father".[483]

Biblical scholars tend to interpret these miracles as Jesus revealing his divine origins to those around him. As one source put it:

> Jesus' miracles demonstrated that he was the expected Messiah and that God's promise of a new kingdom is about to dawn.[484]

I am not sure that the "expected Messiah" bit was uppermost in Jesus' mind. Would he really have wanted people to acknowledge him as God before he consented to cure them? Is that what he meant by using the word 'faith' so often? Faith in him as 'God's Anointed One'? I don't think so.

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[480] Luke 17:11-19.
[481] Matthew 9:28-29.
[482] Mark 9:23.
[483] Luke 9:42.
[484] Bowker, *Bible Handbook*, p. 342.

As I observed in an earlier article Jesus taught his followers to pray to God, not to himself.[485] He urged his listeners to give alms “in secret”, to pray "in secret", hardly the advice of a deity interested in self-promotion.[486]

It seems more likely to me that Jesus healed the sick, etc., in order to remind those around him of a universal truth humanity has forgotten, the truth about grace: that if we are prepared to acknowledge the existence of grace we will see that it is available in such abundance to everyone that even disease melts away before it - like ice in the sunshine.

What strikes me in reading these miracle stories is how desperate many of the people who came to Jesus were. They or their loved ones were enduring such terrible afflictions that they were prepared to consider possibilities outside normal conventions. Another example illustrates this.

Several of the Gospels relate the story of a woman who had been haemorrhaging blood for twelve years. We are told that she “had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse”. In short, the doctors took her money and left her in poorer health than before. When she came across Jesus being besieged by the crowd she managed to get close enough to touch his garments. That was enough to cure her immediately.

This woman’s anguish was so terrible, it seems to me, that she allowed herself to venture beyond the apparent safety of the world she knew. When she found that money could not help her, she became open to grace and it flowed into her through Jesus. As soon as Jesus realised what had happened, he told the woman, "Daughter, your faith has made you well.”[487]

This is why Jesus’ enemies wanted to destroy him. If humanity realised that money was not the route to success and happiness we have been conditioned to believe, “the ruler of this world” would be exposed immediately as powerless.

First though we would have to be shown that grace exists as a free gift to all, that it offers benefits far beyond the bare essentials we need to survive. That, I believe, is why Jesus performed his ‘miracles’: to show us that there was nothing miraculous involved at all, that any of us can do the same.

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[485] The First Mary (Part 4): "All generations will call me blessed" on page 269.
[486] Matthew 6:1-6.
[487] Mark 5:25-34.

Afterthoughts

Taoiseach Leo Varadkar's Covid speech in March 2020 was like an alarm call I could not ignore. It was as if the ground had shifted beneath my feet. At that moment I did not try to rationalise it or reason it out. It was just a very strong feeling I could not shake off, a conviction that everything had changed and nothing would ever be the same again..

Two months earlier I had started writing articles about the 1960s for *Na Seascaidí*. I felt that the decade in which I grew up was important in shaping the world that subsequently developed - socially, politically, and spiritually. However I was not quite sure how or why the sixties were important. Through a combination of personal memory and historical research I hoped to get closer to the truth. Then, after hearing Varadkar's speech, I began to wonder if the answer was not staring me in the face. Were the seeds of the crisis unfolding all around us actually planted during the decade I was writing about?

Up to then I was a sceptic about much of our recent history. I had serious doubts about the official stories behind the Kennedy assassinations and the Moon landings. I hated the way books or TV programmes either avoided any reference to flaws in the approved narratives, or else attacked carefully-selected elements of the alternative theories, not with concrete evidence but with mockery and scorn. However, while I was critical of mainstream media's persistent attempts to cover up the truth of these stories, it never occurred to me to question *everything* they said.

I might have been uneasy about, say, routine childhood vaccinations or the world's economic priorities, but I went along with the rules and customs everyone else followed. I accepted them as part of the fabric of our society. I felt that only eccentrics and anarchists would dare to question them. So my kids got their shots when they were due and I regarded money as essential to life itself.

That all changed with Covid - or at least it began to change.

For me now re-reading the articles that make up this collection is like going through an old diary – a diary not of activities or appointments but of my own awakening to the reality of the world around us. Long-held assumptions fell to pieces when I began to question them. A good example is the *History in the Making* series, "Viruses, Variolation & Vaccines".[1]

When I started researching and writing the articles for that series I had decided to avoid the Covid vaccine then entering the public realm. I regarded it as a rushed and overblown response to an imperceptible threat. Of course my overall scepticism about Covid itself played a big part in my attitude towards the vaccine. Nonetheless, as I stated above, I still accepted the efficacy of 'traditional' vaccines, against polio and tuberculosis for instance. I did not see myself as an 'anti-vaxxer'.

However, as I probed more deeply into the subject and its history I

[1] See pages 233-259.

gradually realised that vaccinations in general are medically useless. I found that they are based on a ludicrous premise, i.e. the best way to safeguard everyone against a dangerous disease is to infect ourselves with a version of that self-same disease.

Vaccines are just one example of the 'truisms' I found to be anything but true. I began to realise that I could take *nothing* for granted anymore as, one by one, long accepted beliefs were exposed as lies.

I questioned the need for money itself. I am a former bank official who has always followed the Micawber principle.[2] So I find the idea of a moneyless life difficult to contemplate, let alone put into practice. Yet I am convinced that none of us will be truly free unless we can somehow overcome our dependence on the world's financial system.[3]

If that was not unsettling enough, I then found that the Blessed Virgin Mary is not the softer feminine counterpart to Jesus that I had always thought her to be – quite the opposite.[4] Although my attitude to religious belief could not be described as orthodox, until very recently I retained a deep reverence for Jesus' mother, influenced no doubt by my Catholic formation and my years in the Legion of Mary.

At the end of one of my articles I wrote that "the bizarre has become commonplace". Whether or not that continues to be true I believe there is no going back. The 'old normal' is gone forever. The future is whatever we choose to make it.

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[2] Named after a character in Charles Dickens' novel, *David Copperfield*, the Micawber principle underlines the importance of keeping annual expenditure within the limits of one's income. Mr Micawber contrasts that approach with spending more than one earns, which, he states, is a recipe for "misery".

[3] See pages 214-228.

[4] See pages 260-277.

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Into the Memory Hole

In 'Nineteen Eighty-Four', George Orwell's prophetic novel about a future "world of lies", the author wrote about a device called the Memory Hole. It is used to alter any record, like a press report or a photograph, that no longer fits with the ever-changing policies of the Big Brother regime.

Now imagine an historian trying to retrieve even a few of those records before they are doctored or destroyed. Would it be possible to reverse what Orwell described as a "process of continuous alteration" of the past?

'Into the Memory Hole' is much more than a nostalgia trip. It is an attempt to re-evaluate our assumptions about human history, to rediscover the shocking truth about our own "world of lies".

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